THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881 Editor : CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVI.—No. 4 Sunday, January 27, 1946 Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Origin of Gods

HOW many books have been written to prove the existence of God? It is not possible to say, but a good word in reply would be "prodigious." And how many sermons and lectures to prove the existence of God have been delivered? The reply here is "incalculable." The believer in God is apt to take this unending production of arguments to prove God exists as evidence of man's unceasing need for God. Actually it proves the growing fact that man, if let alone, would gradually get rid of all the gods. It is also proof that no demonstration of the reality of the existence of God has ever been made. A soap manufacturer of world-wide fame, and certainly of nation-wide advertising, decided some years ago that the name of the firm was so well established that the advertising expense might be cut considerably. It was done—with the result that sales declined and the old scale of advertising had to be resumed. Of course, this did not mean that less soap had been used, only that patronage had been distributed over a wider area. In the case of the belief in God the advertising has actually got less, and the consumption, so to speak, has declined. There is a still further difference in the two situations. Humanity did not begin by using soap, and then in spite of advertising, used it less and less. That occurs with the belief in God. There is a stage in human evolution where everyone believes in gods. They are taken for granted, something that can be reckoned as certainly as the rise of the sun. At that stage men do not discuss whether gods exist. They are more certain of them than they are of anything. The phenomena of the phases of the moon, and the nightly loss of the sun, breed in the primitive mind the possibility of the destruction of both. Primitive minds do not discuss whether gods exist, that is taken for granted, a basis for thought and action. One may summarise the situation by saying that gods are things that mankind believes in during its infancy, and of which a growing number rid themselves in maturity. The very existence of the output of books to prove gods exist is, in itself, a demonstration that doubt is there and grows.

Is God Irrelevant ?

I remember a debate many years ago in which I had to champion Atheism against Theism. My opponent, a clergyman, laid it down that it was my duty to prove either that God did not exist, or that there was not enough evidence to justify belief in his existence. I retorted that my duty was nothing of the kind. What I intended to prove was that God was irrelevant. It had no greater relevance to objective facts than witches, devils, or fairies. The world has gone on for the past century learning more and more about the origin of religious ideas—the customary polite way of saying the origin of the gods—without many having the courage or the wit to apply that knowledge, logically, thoroughly, scientifically to the belief in God. People go on arguing as to whether there is enough evidence to prove God exists, without in the least realising that we might as reasonably argue that while there is another explanation of an electric light or insanity, the real explanation is that the movement of a switch marks the entrance of a little demon into the bulb, and that the real cause of insanity is the presence of a demon in the body.

There is a saying that familiarity breeds contempt. It is accepted as true by many, but it is only true in relation to those who cannot command respect in virtue of their own quality. It belongs to a society in which status counts for more than character and intelligence, and where stiffness and ceremony is needful to establish a sense of superiority. But if familiarity need not breed contempt, it is certain that familiarity with certain words establishes a hold on the general mind, and hides the fact that changes in life often rob these—semi-magical—words of all real significance.

The very word "God" is an illustration of this. What is meant by it? Those who use it do so as though it carried as definite a meaning as gravitation. The truth is not only the meanings attached to "God" are almost as various as those who use it, but no one appears to know what the word originally meant, or if they do, the original sense of it is carefully hidden by godites lest it should expose the very basis of religion. A standard dictionary says that the origin of the word is unknown, but that it is probably an Aryan word meaning that to which sacrifice is made; one of a class of powerful spirits regarded as controlling a department of nature or of human activity. Now I am strongly inclined to believe that this definition was intended to hide—to the godite—a very unpleasant truth. It does not quite succeed because it lets loose the enlightening fact that whatever the origin of the word it stands for a belief in someone or something to whom, or to which, sacrifice was made. But, of course, no savage was ever so unthinking as to offer sacrifice to a stone that was no more than a stone, or to the sun if he did not think that the sun was more than a mass of heated matter. Sacrifice implies the belief that the thing to which sacrifice is made desires the sacrifice and is pleased with it; and the one who sacrifices does it out of thankfulness for favours received, favours to come, or for fear of punishment if the sacrifices are not made. This is the very A B C of human motive, but when dealing with godites, particularly with the well-educated literary ones, one must make things as simple as possible if one is to be understood.

Our definition is illuminative on a very important point when it states the subsidiary clause of the definition; God is "one of a class of powerful spirits controlling a department of nature." In that we get to the very core of the matter. We have been admitted to the inner sanctuary of

the laboratory in which the gods are made. But if that had been stated plainly, and with nothing else, if the introductory clause concerning the word had been omitted, we should have been left with the sentence "that to which sacrifice is made," etc. And that, as the screen American would say, "spills a mouthful." The idea of gods has been maintained under false pretences. Familiarity has played its part. People have accepted the idea for so long, it has bitten so deeply into human thought and social institutions that the majority have been content with a mere name The idea of the savage has been perpetuated. The environment of the savage has been dissipated, but the magic of a word induces large numbers to behave as though we still live in a forest clearing and science was unborn.

The Cradle and the Grave

The definition of "God" we have cited is as near an understanding as one can get. It implies the conditions in which the idea of gods originated. It assumes a society in which nothing is known of the constitution of nature, when man believes that he is at the mercy of a number of powerful spirits on whom he is dependent for everything. He bribes them with sacrifices, with prayers, with ceremonies. If his sacrifices and petitions are followed by good results he has all the proof possible that these spirits exist. If good results do not follow, that is still evidence to the same end. This is a plain account of all the gods, ghosts, angels, devils, and "spiritual" existences that have ever bothered the minds of men and women from the dawn of humanity until 1946.

Consider the situation. Over seventy years ago E. B. Tylor published his great work on comparative anthropology, "Primitive Culture." There were, of course, many anthropologists before Tylor, but one must start somewhere, and to avoid controversy I will say only that we may fairly date from the publication of Tylor's work the first clear expression of a science of comparative mythology. The vital principle of Tylor's work was to show how, in relation to religious ideas, the belief in spirits and gods arose from a sheer misunderstanding of the nature of the forces to which man found himself exposed. Tylor said, in the clearest possible language, that his purpose was to set forth the "animistic philosophy of religion." If words mean anything at all there is in that statement the assertion that all ideas of religion may be traced back to an animistic origin. The later conclusion, probably a correct one, that there existed a pre-animistic period, does not alter the substantial fact. The philosophy of religion begins and ends in animism. The ethical and philosophical arguments for even the probable truth of the belief in God are mere excuses for an animism dressed in modern clothes. I say deliberately that the man who does not recognise this is incapable of drawing the logical inference from the position of Tylor and his successors.

There are also these amongst other significant phrases used by Tylor: "The animism of savages stands for and by itself, it explains its own origin. The animism of civilised man . . . is in great measure only explicable as a developed product of the older and ruder system." What is this but saying that we can only understand modern religious belief when we relate it to the animism of the primitive savage? And after a survey of primitive origins and customs he concludes his great work with a confession that while it may be painful to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstitions, and to mark these out for destruction, the work is urgently needed for the good of mankind.

About twenty years after "Primitive Culture," and another great worker in the field of anthropology, Sir James Frazer, in the preface to "The Golden Bough," rather more timidly, restated Tylor's conclusions. In the preface to that book, after pointing out the obvious significance of his work, he says that "sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach these venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy of a thousand and one tender associations. At present we are only dragging the guns into position; they have hardly begun to speak."

It is a pity that public men in this country should be so timid in pointing the logical inferences to be drawn from their own researches. For, mark, the conclusion to be drawn from Frazer's work, and from the great mass of modern writers, is the same as that which Tylor drew, namely, that the origin of religious beliefs is to be found in the ignorance and fear of primitive humanity. If their researches do not mean this they are without meaning, and are of no greater value than a child's hoarding-up of cherry stones. To find men who imagine themselves capable of understanding the significance of modern science, explaining that they cannot decide whether God exists or not, and at the same time profess themselves followers of leaders such as Tylor, Frazer, Westermarck, Marett, and scores of others at home and abroad, is enough to make one despair of human sanity. If the whole work of modern anthropology does not mean that ideas of gods have the same origin as ideas of devils and witches and fairies and spirits in general, what does that work mean? When we know that a belief began in a mistaken interpretation of experience, what ground have we for saying it may after all be true? To say we cannot decide one way or the other, that we must suspend judgment is to garnish heresy with hypocrisy, and to sacrifice courage on the altar of expediency. We know that the history of religion is the history of a delusion.

For nearly sixty years I have been asking defenders of established religion, and those who stand outside the ranks of religious organisations, to face this issue, without meeting with any response. I get no answer to the simplest and plainest of questions. All I get are wise looks and foolish answers. I get no answer because the only possible one is carefully avoided. The answer given is as relevant to the situation as demonism would be in modern medicine. There is no more room for the belief in God in genuine scientific thought than there is in psychiatry for demons as the cause of insanity. To-day God is a sheer irrelevance.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

We don't quite see how some of the things in spiritualism are done, and we leave the subject with an almost painful sense of bewilderment. But to say that because we cannot understand some of the feats, therefore they must be due to spirits or psychic force, is merely an opiate for the uneasiness of suspended judgment, a refuge from the trouble of thinking.—F. Podmore.

DAVID COPPERFIELD'S CREATOR

DAME UNA POPE-HENNESSY'S "Charles Dickens" (Chatto & Windus, 21s.; 1945) is a solid contribution to the many disquisitions concerning that celebrated novelist. If some of her verdicts are questionable, or her frank treatment of her subject's matrimonial entanglements serves to exasperate his more ardent admirers, it may be pleaded that the truth regarding even the most eminent of men should be admitted, cost what it may.

Dickens was in some respects a psychological puzzle. He was ever at the mercy of his emotions and his strenuous efforts in the causes that lay nearest his heart are coloured by his sensitiveness towards what he deemed ill-doing.

His progenitor, John Dickens, was a feckless father, and many of his failings were shared by most members of an improvident family who remained an embarrassment to the only man of real ability it contained, throughout the greater part of his career. Still, Dickens' sad experiences as a boy and his later family annoyances served to enrich literature with the Marshalsea scenes in "Little Dorrit" as well as the pathetic pictures of the Fleet Prison for debtors in "Pickwick."

Dickens' experiences as solicitor's clerk and reporter, finally in the gallery of the House of Commons where, in 1832, he reported "the last speeches made during the Committee stage of the Reform Bill" are noted. A highly efficient reporter, he was chosen to transcribe speeches delivered by prominent politicians in the provinces.

Amid his varied experiences, the future author preserved his careful impressions of men and things for subsequent incorporation in his novels and tales.

Among the very few public men whom Dickens admired was Lord John Russell and in later years the two men became intimate friends. In one of their conversations Dickens expressed his candid opinion of the intolerant Lord's Day Observance Bill which was only defeated by a narrow majority. His "views on Sunday observances," notes his biographer, "had always been continental and by now he was convinced that the type of religion to which the poor English had been obliged to sacrifice theatre-going and much innocent enjoyment must be, to say the least of it, defective."

Dickens confesses that he was highly elated when he discovered that a slight sketch he had posted to the "Monthly Magazine" had appeared in print, and he soon assured himself that he could produce what the public would buy. Thus his maiden efforts were ultimately published as "Sketches by Boz."

A valued friend, Serjeant Talfourd, now introduced Boz to two distinguished society ladies—Lady Holland and the Countess of Blessington, while he formed a close friendship with Angela Burdett, later celebrated as Miss Burdett Coutts, the wealthy heiress, with whom he co-operated and corresponded until his death. He found a wife in Catherine Hogarth who seems to have resembled Dora Spenlow a great deal more than Agnes Wickfield, who became David Copperfield's second wife. A colourless character, there is one good story concerning her when in the course of a discussion on Eve and Eden, Catherine remarked in broad Scotch: "Eh, mon, it would have been no temptation to me to gae running about a garden stark naked ating green apples."

Dickens valued money and, indeed, Dr. Inge suggests that he was too fond of it. Yet he seems to have been a poor business man, for while his writings were selling well he was angered by the thought that his publishers were being enriched at his expense. Yet, as Dame Hennessy observes: "In 1835 he was glad to take £200 for a novel. Two months after agreeing with Bentley to let him have the 'Barnaby Rudge' copyright for three years for £700, he got paid £3,000 by Chapman and Hall for five years' copyright for 'Nicholas Nickleby.'"

The opening numbers of "Pickwick" aroused little interest and 400 copies only of the first instalment found purchasers. But there was a sensational increase in sales and, of the fifteenth number, 40,000 copies were sold. Dickens always entertained a high opinion of "Pickwick" and despite the disparaging comments of critics he was confident that the work would enjoy a sustained popularity, a confidence completely justified in the coming years.

An extremely energetic personality, Dickens' passion for private theatricals; his activities in instituting benevolent societies, and the deep sympathy he always evinced in the toils and sufferings of the poor, occupied a great part of his life. His friendships were many, but his generous hospitality and the time spent in social intercourse lessened his opportunities for authorship. Yet, his output was large, and his writings published prior to his first visit to America, included the "Sketches," "Oliver Twist," "Pickwick," "Barnaby Rudge," and the "Old Curiosity Shop."

The Poor Law of 1834 was officially considered a success, but what Dickens thought of its administration is delineated in "Oliver Twist." As his biographer declares: "He shows up the cruelty and meanness of parish authorities from beadle to guardian. A system that put power into the hands of such people needed exposure and he determined to tell the public what it was really like to be a charity child." That his opinions underwent no change is evident in the case of Betty Higden in "Our Mutual Friend," one of the latest of Dickens' novels.

"Nicholas Nickleby" is perhaps best remembered for its pitiless exposure of the Yorkshire Schools and, although it is obviously a young novelist's work it contains a very remarkable range of characters.

"The Old Curiosity Shop" is famous for its pathetic pictures of the wanderings and early death of Little Nell, as well as its gallery of amusing creations such as Dick Swiveller, the Marchioness and Sally Brass, while the touching description of Nell's death brought tears to the eyes of O'Connell and even Lord Jeffrey gave way to emotion.

Dame Hennessy greatly underrates that excellent novel, "Barnaby Rudge," with its realistic pictures of the No Popery Riots of 1780. Still, she allows that Dolly Varden was greatly esteemed by readers. Yet, she notes that: "Wilkie Collins looked upon it as a poor book weakly put together, a verdict one must endorse."

Dickens' first visit to America was in 1842 when he was effusively welcomed as the nation's guest. He was lionised and treated as a semi-divine being until he publicly protested against the manner in which authors were robbed by publishers in the States who pirated their writings without a penny of payment. In the absence of international copyright, they could do this with impunity. It is stated that: "In making his attack on piracy Dickens did not mince matters; he declared it to be a plain question of right and wrong, justice or injustice. There *must* be an international arrangement in this respect."

Dickens was surprised to find that almost all cultured people in Boston were Unitarians and that Harvard's Professors were also Deists. He was deeply impressed by their leading minister, Dr. Channing, and he thought that as none of the Trinitarian creeds could claim him he might join the congregation of his trusted friend W. J. Fox—the predecessor of Moncure Conway—and attach himself to the London Unitarians. Theirs was, he said, "the religion that has sympathy for the men of every creed and ventures to pass judgment on none." When he returned to England, Dickens attended the services of Fox at his Essex Street chapel and later he rented "sittings for himself and family at the chapel in Little Portland Street, the minister of which, Mr. Tagart, was to become another trusted friend."

In its American scenes, "Martin Chuzzlewit" is a scornful satire, and the wonder is that its author was ever forgiven. Its sale in its earlier stages of publication was slow, but with the

advent of Mrs. Gamp the demand greatly mounted. This work is certainly one of Dickens' greatest achievements and its characters include Pecksniff, Tom Pinch, Montagu Tigg, Mark Tapley, Bailey, Mrs. Prig and many others.

Dickens visited Italy in 1844 and his impressions are recorded in his "Pictures" from that peninsula. He was saddened by the dirt and decay of Genoa "where every fourth or fifth man that he passed was a 'repulsive-featured religious.'" Venice was a revelation, but with Rome he was disappointed until he saw the majestic ruins of the ancient City. At the sight of St. Peter's he says: "I felt no very strong emotion. I have been infinitely more affected by many English cathedrals when the organ has been playing."

Holy Week in the Eternal City simply disgusted Dickens. His biographer summarises his experiences: "He saw the Pope being 'carried about like a Guy Fawkes,' the Washing of the Feet, and the slow Good Friday 'knee shuffle' up the Scala Santa, 'ridiculous and unpleasant in its unmeaning degredation.' For him that was the keynote of it all, the meaninglessness of the Church, and its infamous taste in draping architectural features in 'impertinent frippery.'" Moreover, Dickens execrated the Bambino as well as the frescoes depicting the sufferings of martyrs.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded)

FREETHINKERS AND REBELS *v.* GODISTS AND CONFORMISTS

IV.

(Continued from page 461)

Bruno, 1600; Vanini, 1619; Galileo, 1642 v. Nicolaus of Cusa, 1464; Copernicus, 1543.

J. M. Robertson, 1933 v. Andrew Lang, 1912.

1. "In matters of the intellect, compromise is almost always a dangerous policy."—C.C., 1921 (and before) (p. 8.)

2. "The need of to-day is not so much liberal thought as strong and courageous thought; and one would cheerfully hand back to orthodoxy a fairly large parcel of a certain type of heretical thinker in exchange for a single one who used plain language to express clear convictions."—(p. 17.)

3. "The average man lives mentally from hand to mouth, and troubles as little about ultimate explanations as he does about the exhaustion of the coal supply."—(p. 70.)

4. "Thus the misuse of the name of God may ('and does'—A.Z.) resemble the strategy in war of putting up dummies to make an enemy imagine that a fort is still held long after it has been abandoned by the garrison."—Sir James Frazer, in "The Belief in Immortality," quoted by C.C. (p. 17.)

5. "There is no exception to the fact that men have everywhere come to the conclusion that the earth was flat, and yet a wider and truer knowledge proved that universal belief to be quite false. The fact of a certain belief being universal only warrants the assumption that the belief has a cause, but it tells us nothing whatever concerning its truthfulness. . . . Thus it is not surprising to find that, as the human organism is everywhere fundamentally alike, it has everywhere come to the same conclusions in face of the same set of conditions. A man reacts to the universe in one way, and a jelly fish in another way. And universality is as true of the reactions of the latter as it is of those of the former."—(pp. 20-21.)

6. "Justification by emotion has only been attempted when other means of securing conviction have failed. And the appeal to emotion has become popular for very obvious reasons. . . . It enables mediocrities to enjoy the feeling of being wise without the trouble of acquiring wisdom. It enables inherited prejudices to rank as reasoned convictions. . . . In whatever form . . . it harbours a fallacy. *Intellectual activity is not and cannot be divorced from emotion. There are states of mind in which feeling predominates, and there are others in which reason predominates. But all intellectual states involve a feeling element. The often-made remark that feeling and intellect are in conflict is true only in the sense that ultimately certain intellectual states, plus their associated feelings, are in conflict with other intellectual states, plus their associated feelings.* To realise this one need only consider the sheer pleasure that results from the rapid sweep of the mind through a lengthy chain of reasoning, and the positive pain that ensues-when the terms of a proposition baffle comprehension. The force of this is admitted by Professor Thomson in the remark that man at the limit of his endeavour has fallen back on religion. *Quite so; that is, the painful feelings evoked by an intellectual failure have thrown a certain type of mind back on religion. In this they have acted like one who flies to a drug for relief from a pain he lacks the courage to bear.* . . . Those who have made the pursuit of 'cold scientific truth' their life's work have shown every whit as much ardour and passion as those who have given their life to religion."—(pp. 46-7.)

7. "'God' is always what Spinoza called it, the asylum of ignorance. When causes are unknown 'God' is brought forward. When causes are known 'God' retires into the background. 'God' is not an Explanation, it is a Narcotic."—(p. 72.)

8. "But I can give you a still more striking instance of how the men of the study have based morality upon knowledge ('understanding'—A.Z.). I refer to that little band of real workers, to the Humanists of the early sixteenth century. Men like Erasmus, Sebastian Brant and Conrad Muth were working for a real reformation of the German people on the basis of education, of knowledge, of that progress which alone is sure, because it is based on the reason. . . . Suffice it to say that Luther described evil-doing as disobedience to a supernatural code; sin as a want of belief in Jesus the Christ; and reason as the 'archwhore' and 'devil's bride.'"—"Ethic of Freethought," Karl Pearson (p. 112.)

9. ". . . Luther tells us that he will give as his true counsel: 'First, that the Jewish synagogues and schools be set on fire, and what will not burn be covered with earth, that no man ever after may see stick or stone thereof. . . . Secondly, that their houses in like fashion be broken down and destroyed. . . . Let him who can, throw pitch and sulphur upon them; if anyone could throw hell-fire, it were good, so that God might see our earnestness, and the whole world such an example.'"—"Ethic of Freethought" (p. 217.)

These quotings were not plucked to make a Freethought bouquet, but because there is a direct relation to the subject. One to seven are from Chapman Cohen's "Theism or Atheism," 1921; and, as he is, and has been, the chief exponent of that Scientific Atheist Philosophy which is the only basis for a really scientific method in all departments of Evolutionary Sociology, I cannot do better for an introduction. The book contains all that is necessary to *understand* the question of "Humanism v. Godism." No. 6, with my italics, "explains" the mental conduct of Bertrand Russell, Joad, etc., when faced with the fact that they have been wrong and misleading during most of their lives. It also "explains" those who have had "ersatz" Godisms of absolute or fixed ideas, dream ideals, etc., in which emotion predominates mischievously over intellect.

Nos. 8 and 9, from Karl Pearson, expose how the Lutheran Protestants have "collaborated" against freedom and progress in the mental "Rake's Progress" into Christ cum Hegelianism and then to two world wars. The tragedy is that the cult of "In Memoriam" platonic Christism so infected the politically democratic lands that they were powerless to unite in time against "Nazi" Fascism.

"Fortnightly Review: founded 1865," November, 1945.
"What Kind of a Future?" by W. R. Inge.

Opening par.: "There are no beginnings or ends in history. The old reappears in a new form: sauter pour mieux reculer—sometimes. (This is an inverting of the usual, 'reculer pour mieux sauter,' 'to go back, the better to leap forward': apparently inverted to be a 'reviver' to 'Tories'—religious and/or political!'—A.Z.). We picture the course of events not in an irreversible straight line, but in crests and troughs, in spirals, in swinging pendulums, and even—with Nietzsche and the Ancients—in cycles. There seem to be anabolic and catabolic periods, periods when energy is being stored, and periods when it is being discharged, revolutions followed by equilibrium, and an equilibrium by a revolution.

Tennyson, a far deeper thinker than it is customary to admit (!), says that 'God fulfils himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

The most important event in history (another!) and the most mysterious, is the almost simultaneous (?) emergence of the higher religion and of fruitful thinking about ultimate reality, about the middle of the last millennium before the Christian era (c. 500 B.C.) in China, India, Persia, Palestine and Greece. (A prophecy of U.S. America in 1945?)."

Last sentence in last par.: "There can be no 'New World' while human nature and inhuman nature remain substantially unchanged, and while time, as Plato says, is a moving image of eternity." (De'il preserve us a'!)

"The English Review," November, 1945.—First item is a "Commentary," in pars., by Sir Charles Petrie, Bt.: "The balance of power in Europe has been lost. . . . Always exercised for the good of her friends as well as herself. . . . An agreement between Great Britain, Austria and France made the Tsar Alexander I. more reasonable and peace was saved. . . .

". . . . In the Far East the situation is, fortunately, different. There, a balance still exists between U.S.A., Russia, and China. (Poor old U.K.!) . . . .

"European Conservatism on the other hand is dead, save in Spain and Portugal (!) It was not killed by the recent war; rather did it commit suicide during the course of the struggle. For centuries it was based and flourished upon the principle of devotion to throne and altar . . . the resurrection will come only if the tendencies of the last 30 years are reversed; that is to say, if those whose creed is throne and altar refuse to be turned from their duty, and if they can shake off their feeling of inferiority which so frequently distinguishes them (!) They have allowed themselves to be classed as Fascists and Nazis. (Nazti Fascists.) . . . .

"An atomic bomb in the hands of a Nihilist is hardly a reassuring prospect.

"This is bad enough, but what is equally disquieting is the number of people who are playing with fire. Prof. Laski may like striking his matches in powder magazines; at any rate he would appear to know what he is doing, which is more than can be said for some of his co-religionists. . . ."

Not being within easy reach of a public library, I see only a small part of the contemporary evidence for the indictment against Godism as "the Historic Enemy of Human Freedom and Progress." What I have herein put forward from W. R. Inge and Sir Charles Petrie, Bt., as witnesses, was obtained on a "chance" visit to one of the nearer cities. I leave it to our readers to judge its value in a "Trial," greater and older, far, than the legal one at Nuremberg.

ATHOSO ZENOO.

The notion of the continuity of civilisation is no barren philosophic principle, but is at once made practical by the consideration that they who wish to understand their own lives ought to know the stages through which their opinions and habits have become what they are.—E. B. Tylor.

KOESTLER AND KAFKA

WE have recently met a number of eminent critics, including Norman Nicholson and Julian Symons, who have worked out in interesting detail a supposed parallelism between the work of Franz Kafka and that of Rex Warner. This is presumably based on the fact that they both write allegory—even though there is a great difference in that Rex Warner points his allegory directly at the political and social issues of the day, whereas Kafka, if I read him aright, attempts to give us a picture of man struggling hopelessly against his fate in a world where the dice are loaded against him.

To my mind there is a much closer parallel (and one which, at any rate to my knowledge, has never been worked out in any detail) between the work of Franz Kafka and that of Arthur Koestler. Again it has to be admitted that there are differences. Koestler does not deal in allegory. His novels are pictures of fact as he sees it. But there is an extraordinary parallelism between Kafka's "The Trial" and Koestler's "Darkness at Noon," which must strike any perceptive reader who even glances at one of the books immediately after having read the other.

Both books are tales of hopeless struggle against superior odds. Both present the value of the individual, even though his individuality may be swamped by the mass. In the case of Koestler it is the dynamic mass of Communist orthodoxy against which Rubashov vainly strives, and Kafka's K. fights, to all appearances, against the static mass which is fate, or destiny, or God (according to which interpretation one places on the allegory).

Yet the two men have much in common, in spite of a superficial difference in aim. They both share an intense belief in the integrity and dignity of the individual, opposed to the lunatic State which now seems so frequently to demand allegiance. They both have a deep and overwhelming pity for suffering. They both believe that man should know something better than a mere matter of eating and drinking.

Koestler, naturally, knows more about the pernicious way in which power-politics may involve men. After all, Kafka died in 1924, before the rise of Hitler showed the logical end towards which many of the modern tendencies in politics were pointing. Koestler lived through the difficult years, and his complete disillusionment with the Soviet Revolution, in which he once so passionately believed, underlines the motive which has inspired so many writers, from Herbert Read downwards, in recent years.

For so many years now literature in Britain has been artificially isolated from literature on the Continent of Europe. This has caused an over-development in that hearty hail-fellow-well-met type of novel, which seems to have been the typical English product from the days of Dickens to the days of J. B. Priestley. The intellectual novel, save in the now despondent hands of H. G. Wells, seems to have almost died a natural death. And that is why writers like Koestler and Kafka have so much of value for our civilisation. They both bring forward once again the novel of ideas. They unite in a direct condemnation of tyranny. And the fact that Koestler denounces a political tyranny, while Kafka's denunciation applies to the blind fate which appears to drive men to a trial for some offence which they never knew they committed, does not alter the fact that these two writers have a power and an influence which no British novelist of our generation (except possibly Alex Comfort: we shall have to await the successor to "The Power House" to be sure about him) can wield.

Koestler and Kafka; Kafka and Koestler. They are a strange pair, but underneath the superficial appearance of difference they are much akin.

S. H.

ACID DROPS

It is interesting to learn that the Church of St. Luke, Norland, Yorkshire, has gone on "strike." The church has had such poor attendances at the morning services that the vicar has closed the doors. That is good news. It shows that the curate has some grit. Of course it is unkind to those wishing to come to church in the morning, but even curates are human and to have the emptiness of his church forced upon his notice by empty seats must be a very trying ordeal. "Dearly beloved brethren" must sound rather curious when the curate only is in attendance, and he knows that his "beloved" is snoring in a comfortable warm bed.

But we think the principle could be carried further. It is reported that the afternoon attendances have improved since the Sunday morning services have been abandoned. Probably God has moved the people in the afternoon. But why don't the congregation and the vicar apply the boycott on a larger scale and against a greater person? Six years ago God was asked to prevent war, but the war came. Then we asked him to secure for us a speedy victory, and it took six years to bring it about. We asked God for other things, and in most instances things went wrong. Now, why not act as the curate did and inform God—of course, respectfully—that it has been decided that prayers to him will not be continued unless he pays early attention to the needs of his children? The curate has shown us that there are limits to the patience of preachers. God should be—respectfully—told that his children are losing patience with their heavenly parent.

If the idea of God were of any real value to man, either as a source of comfort or as an explanation of difficulties, something might be said in favour of its retention. But it is neither. Those who find comfort in it are those who have been taught to do so. The comfort is the expression of their training, not an evidence of the value of the belief. And those who are without it find no lack of comfort from other sources. They have simply got rid of a theory that adds many new difficulties without removing any that already exist. As an hypothesis, the idea of God is worse than useless. We do not reason up to it as the result of logical examination; we cannot logically reason down from it to the facts of life, once it has been accepted. Valueless as an instrument of investigation or as a means of explanation, its only utility consists in satisfying feelings which are themselves created and perpetuated in order to furnish a reason for the continued existence of this belief.

In terms of English law there is no such thing as a religious marriage. It was, of course, not always so. There was a time when, following the Roman Catholic plan, marriage could only be accomplished by a preacher. But the scandal became so great that it forced the Government to take marriage altogether out of the hands of the churches, and to-day the secular marriage is the only one recognised by the State. Of course, a marriage may take place in a church, but only if it is licensed. And the marriage may be registered by a clergyman, but only when he holds a secular licence. Nothing essential to marriage is religious. No one has yet been able to prove that a marriage minus a priest and his god is in any degree worse than when the priest, as such, registered the marriage. But the clergyman suffers.

We mentioned these things because the Catholic Church has lost its hold on what was one of the most prominent of its supporters—both as regards cash and prestige. As with this country the new Polish Government admits of no marriage as legal that has not been registered by an official appointed by the State. If a Roman Catholic wishes to have a Roman Catholic ceremony he may have it whenever he pleases and by whatever process he pleases. But the State marriage must be performed if the marriage is to be considered legal. In this matter history is repeating itself. The English priesthood protested as much as it could, or dared, and for a long time the cry went forward that a registrar marriage was not a real marriage. There are still those who from sheer ignorance or religion still repeat the lie.

There was a time when the threat of Hell Fire and the tortures suffered by sinners for eternity was a great card in the game of religion. Somehow or other, the scientists, during the nineteenth century particularly, put the fire out, leaving one with the impression that if there is a Hell it is an incomparably more pleasant place than Heaven, and our religious teachers these days have very reluctantly laid as little stress as possible on the threats so glibly uttered by Jesus as to what would happen to people who did not believe in Him.

Now come the B.B.C. religious gang, and they are playing a splendid substitute for Hell Fire—the Atomic Bomb, with all the energy and enthusiasm that Calvinist and Salvation Army preachers showed whenever they could put the Devil and his fiery habitation into their exhortations. Almost word-for-word listeners are now getting the same kind of "evangel" our grandfathers had to undergo with the Atomic Bomb substituted for Hell. The people of this country are told that they will be wiped out by the coming of the bomb "like a thief at night" unless they immediately mend their ways and swallow the fundamentalist Christianity sponsored by the B.B.C. God is going to have no mercy. It is all very amusing, of course, and the only serious thing about it is, how can these religious fools imagine that their silly threats can have any influence in these days?

The Pope is standing no nonsense in Germany. He has ordered the German bishops to get on with building Catholic schools, organisations, and a Press—which of course means that the occupying authorities are quite satisfied to allow these things, as they are told that the Nazis had swept away everything Catholic "in the cataclysm of persecution." The truth is that most of the Nazi "high-ups," including Hitler, were practising Catholics, and that the cataclysm of persecution was almost identical with that which had dominated Romanism for centuries. But of course the Pope, finding it pays, is working the persecution story for all that it is worth. And he knows he will be believed because he is—the Pope.

The "Universe" through its priestly adviser rather hesitatingly admits that Dumas' "love stories" are on the Index—thus they are not allowed to be read by all good Catholics. Still, he adds that "it is arguable that this does not apply to the English editions of the 'Three Musketeers,' 'The Count of Monte Cristo,' etc." There is great virtue in the "etc." We should like to have the titles of the "love" stories of Dumas which would soil the precious chastity of Catholics. As a matter of fact, Dumas is a singularly clean writer, and the two books named are typical examples of the way he treats "love" themes. The Index is a disgrace to civilisation.

Canon Baker has been trying to reconcile his dislike of toleration with the claim that it is "an assurance of divine revelation." "Toleration," he says, "has three perils. Almost inevitably it leads to the heresies that religion is a man's private concern . . . that as all religions can hardly be true, probably they are all false . . . it encourages the sneer of the intolerant . . ." In spite of this "toleration is the very marrow in the bones of Anglicanism"—which might easily mean that you can hold almost any belief and still call yourself an Anglican—or it might not. As to Canon Baker's conclusion, we can only say that toleration or not, the only way he considers man can be saved is to believe in the Canon's Anglicanism; and he could have said that without saying anything about toleration.

"The Lord looks after His own." That is one of the current and ancient expressions of faith in God. But here is the Rev. W. Matthews, Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Winchmore Hill, giving notice that the Church cannot be any longer guarded day and night because there are not enough volunteers to go on guard and prevent the Church ornaments being stolen. There seems to be a moral about this announcement.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
Telephone No. Holborn 2601. London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. J. Lerol.—Thanks, but the subject is really not worth the space taken. The party indicated appears to us to be out for advertising himself.

Scottie.—We have the two books named and may review them both as soon as we have the space. It appears to be a difficult job to keep God on his feet—or ought we say, to keep him flying?

A.Z.—Thanks for good wishes which we reciprocate. Regret we are unable to use the diagrams. Shall hope to see you soon.

T. Benton.—Thanks for sending circular. It was the founder of the Salvation Army who said, when someone commented on the character of some of his financial supporters: "There is no such thing as dirty money." That is a very wide opinion.

E. Skidley.—Thanks for paper it will come in for good use. But it must wait.

C. J. Little.—Your friend may be quite right. But it is surely not fair to take the disliking of the Russian system by an Englishman as being decisive. At the very lowest, the Russia that is should be compared with the Russia that was. We think very few would deny that the present Russia is more humane and holds out more hope for the future.

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

We are rather late in noting the appearance of the "Rationalist Annual" (Watts & Co.; 2s.). Of special value in the Annual are articles, namely, "Mind and Matter" by Bertrand Russell, and an historical sketch of Thomas Holcroft, "Anthropology and the Future of Civilisation" by Lord Raglan, a specially useful article by Archibald Robertson on "Catholic Propaganda and the World War." There is also in the Annual a rather useless account from C. E. M. Joad advising the world that he is no longer a "Rationalist." He began with a god, then threw him over as of no consequence, and now informs heaven and earth—particularly earth—that he has gone back to God—at least he had at the time of the printing of the Annual. And at a pinch the Roman Catholic Church is always open.

Another book of outstanding value is one that we ought to have noted earlier, "Morals in World History," by Archibald Robertson. It is a capital piece of work, the main fault we find is that there ought to have been more of it. As it is, it has the appearance of being cramped in parts. We hope that the sale will warrant speedily a new edition which will provide more elaboration. It is, we think, the best piece of work Mr. Robertson has done. The book is published by Watts & Co., price 8s. 6d.

In the Public Lecture Halls, Northgate, Blackburn, Mr. J. Clayton will lecture on "The Persistence of Religion." Mr. Clayton is very well known around this area and his well-merited support will carry additional encouragement to the local N.S.S. branch. The meeting commences at 7 p.m.

The Newcastle Branch N.S.S. will give a welcome to Mr. R. H. Rosetti in the Odeon Cafe, Northumberland Street, where tea has been arranged for 5 p.m. At 7 p.m., Mr. Rosetti will lecture in the Socialist Hall, Old Arcade, Pilgrim Street, on "God and the Atomic Bomb." Admission to the lecture is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each. Mr. J. T. Brighton has the arrangements in hand and that means efficient attention to all details.

On Saturday, February 2, the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. will hold a social evening at 38, John Bright Street (Room 13). From 6 till 10 p.m. there will be dancing, whist, and general entertainment; tickets 2s. 6d. each, including refreshments. A social side in branch activity is a very useful asset especially in attracting young people to our movement. We hope the Birmingham effort will be well supported.

West Ham Branch N.S.S. holds its Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, January 29, at 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E., at 7-45 p.m. Will all members please attend.

Owing to unforeseen circumstances there will be no meeting in the Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow, next Sunday (January 27). The next meeting will be on March 3 next, when Mr. Chapman Cohen will be the speaker.

One of the phrases one often meets in print is "Psychology of a People." There is, of course, a loose connection between peoples in both habit and language. But what is it? How does it arise? After all, wherever it is it can in fact mean no more than a mental disposition by the influence of identical teachings and modes of life. It is not something that people are born with, it is something that is developed by the pressures of a particular environment. It is firm while the pressure is general and heavy. But suppose the children of English people are, while quite young, sent to live with people in France, then let them beget children and they will appear as French men or women. The psychology of the Englishman will have gone, and so with as many examples as one cares to take. What has become of the psychology of the Normans who invaded England? What has become of the Dutch, the German, English, Irish, Italian and others who invaded and made the United States as it is? It is the character of the social environment that determines finally the characters of a people.

"Illico," of the "British Weekly," remarks offhand that: "No one supposes that we can demonstrate the Christian faith in such a way that only a moron will not accept it." That may, of course, hold true of some parts of the Christian faith, but it is true that there are large and important parts of Christianity that only a very, very foolish person can accept it. The story of the birth of Jesus is one of these; the miracle of the loaves and fishes is another; there is also the contest between Jesus and Satan; the raising of men from the grave, and so forth. Many of these things are nowadays thrown overboard—except by the B.B.C. preachers in the early morning. And we must also remember that it was just these impossible things that led many people to accept Jesus as really God. Even now the Roman Catholic Church lives chiefly on the acceptance of impossible stories. Indeed, if we take away all the miraculous Christian stories, there is nothing else to keep Christianity alive. So soon as things are reduced—or raised to a scientific level—they seem to be of the slightest value to Christianity.

The Vicar of Camrose is disturbed in spirit. He complains that a great many parents nowadays go straight to the Register Office to register the names of their babies, and never bother to give the Church notice of what they have done. Why should they? Taking a baby to Church and having it named is of no legal necessity, and to go through some kind of a service is of no legal value whatever. The vicar thinks that before going to the Register Office he should register the child at the Church. The parent could then take the notice, signed by the parson, to the Registrar. For downright impudence give us a man in holy orders. Of course, what is really troubling the clergy is the rapidly growing number of Christians who are not interested in any Church ceremonies.

PREACHING VICTORIANS

I.

THE greater part of the nineteenth century, especially after the first three decades, was a period of much eloquent preaching. Roughly it corresponds with the Victorian age. Possibly future historians will call it the Preaching Era alternatively to the Victorian Era.

It was the time when churches and chapels filled and crowded congregations expected long and strong sermons, and got them. Places of worship had the emotional hold which kinemas have now. One could name dozens of fervent preachers. Illustrative is Charles H. Spurgeon of the Tabernacle, whose reprinted sermons in pamphlet form under the general title of "Sword and Trowel" sold in hundreds of thousands.

Then Nonconformity was at its zenith. Dissent, following John Wesley, has always made preaching a central feature of its services, as seen in the platform with middle-placed pulpit of chapels.

But Nonconformity went a-whoring after party politics, thinking it had achieved dominance in the Liberal triumph of 1906. Within a few years it fell, and great was the fall thereof. It fell, like Lucifer, never to rise again.

The Salvation Army owed most of its early success to the passionate preaching of William Booth. Welsh revivals swept the Principality by frenzied preaching. The ambition of nearly every Welsh boy was to be a preacher. It invaded secular life, as seen in the raging, tearing Temperance Movement.

A saddening thought is that this preaching gusto followed upon the great Reform Act of 1832. That may not have been the cause, but whence came it? The wave of moralism spreading from the Court, particularly after arrival of Prince Albert, intensified the preaching campaign. Also it was a century of oratory generally; oratory stately or perfervid, weighty or inflamed, aimed both at middle-class and the masses, before compulsory education, cheap books and the popular Press reached them.

This is exemplified in William Ewart Gladstone, a great Parliamentarian, a great orator—and a great preacher. Self-confessedly so he wrote a book titled and defending "The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture."

Let no infidel scoff or cynic sneer, but it has to be conceded that the impregnable rock is drifting away in fragments like a child's sand castle does before the incoming tide.

II.

Surprising phenomenon of the Preaching Epoch was not the preaching by priests, parsons, ministers, pious laity and all of that sort. It was their job and they did it, with the excuse that it was their only way of reaching the populace, who showed a desire to be preached at, took pleasure in it.

The astonishing feature is that the preaching fervour not only overflowed into ordinary life, into oratory, politics and social reform, but invaded literature. Even those two giants of poetry, Browning and Tennyson, were not free from the preaching prevalence, though it must be admitted they did it skilfully and musically, often dramatically, rendering their sermons in noble or flaming verse; but the preaching is there however attractively rhymed and numbered.

Minor poets were franker, especially those who wrote for juveniles, as Ann and Jane Taylor and dozens more poetasters. Their leader was Charles Kingsley, he setting the pace with—

> "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.
> Do noble things, not dream them all day long,
> And so make life, death and the great forever
> One grand sweet song."

It is a sermon in verse, mercifully short. Kingsley had the excuse that he was a clergyman, paid a stipend to preach, so did it conscientiously and thoroughly.

He did indeed! When he wrote literature he preached. The characters in "Westward Ho!" are not Elizabethans; they are exponents of muscular Christianity. All his novels abound with sermons; are sermons. Cut out the preaching from "The Water Babies" and there is not a great deal left.

III.

Preaching, of course, invaded education during the nineteenth century. The chapel was not only an integral part of a public school; it was a prominent part, with a clergyman as headmaster. This is illustrated in Matthew Arnold. Son of the great preaching Doctor Arnold of Rugby, he wrote a yearning poem on Rugby Chapel. Even when he abandoned orthodox religion he could not resist preaching. His controversies are about it. He writes a book on the prophecies of Isaiah. In the Old Testament he discovers a seeking for a power not ourselves which makes for righteousness. This is a gift to preparers of sermons.

As Chief Inspector of Schools Matthew Arnold was able to impress his views on education. Resultantly English State education retains compulsory religion. Our educational system is altogether Victorian; that is, compounded of snobbery, moralism and religiosity; hypocrisy carried to the degree of humbug; all enforced by Acts of Parliament.

IV.

Thomas Carlyle was a historian, a philosopher, a litterateur, most certainly he was a preacher; emphasised by his coming from Scotland, where preaching was as plentiful and lengthy as in Wales. "Sartor Resartus," "Past and Present," "Latter-Day Pamphlets," and many others contain matter for hundreds of sermons. Silence and hard work were his favourite themes, by a man who practised neither.

John Ruskin rivalled and outstripped him as a preacher. "The King of the Golden River" preaches at children as much as does Kingsley's "Water Babies."

From Ruskin's infant sermon "People, be good," to his old-age correspondence with a Lakeland parson on the need for more ethical preaching, his volumes are largely one long string of sermons. Like Carlyle he preached the virtues of poverty and hard work. This came happily from a man whose father left him a huge fortune made by the useful and democratic labour of wine-dealing.

Appropriately does the Anglican Catechism enjoin godparents to cause their godchildren to hear sermons. England in the nineteenth century obeyed the Church's command. Consequently the twentieth century sees church-going down to less than ten per cent. of the population, and steadily dwindling.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

"GEORDIES, WHAT FETTLE, GATESHEAD!"

OUR very parochially-minded rag of a local paper announced the news, a few afternoons ago, that "Sunday cinemas in Gateshead were going to be permitted—but not just yet!" The article proceeded to state that the local Labour councillors were busy deliberating upon the matter, and that much hard work would be involved in meeting opposition, of a substantial character, which would entail much wrangling and discussion, and later on, ballots; the final issue probably demanding a vote being taken to settle the matter.

We Freethinkers know nicely where that opposition will spring from, as that loathsome tribe of persecutors—parish priests and Sunday observance pests, is sure to flutter its wings and rise from its dunghill of corruption, intent upon prosecuting its nefarious and malicious designs to the bitter end! Every form

of obstructionist tactics will be employed, and it may take months to successfully counter this malignant and sinister crowd of Christian fanatics.

At this stage it is pertinent to ask—do the people of Gateshead want Sunday cinema shows? That question seems to be quite unnecessary, but I would point out that the powers-that-be have, for the past few years, permitted the use by at least three of the best equipped cinemas for Sunday evening concerts, but whether such shows are appreciated remains open to doubt, about which however more anon.

To those of you who have never visited Tyneside, I would point out that Gateshead town is largely a plague spot of vice and squalor. Its slums are appalling, and its main traffic artery, High Street, is an eyesore, squalid in its miserable collection of ramshackle, decaying, and dilapidated shops which disgrace its lower portions.

In the middle of this insanitary and germ-laden phalanx stands that hoary monument of piety—the Holy Trinity Church, guardian of Gateshead's public morality whose stretch of street pavement has become the public spittoon for the many aged human wrecks which occupy throughout the day the concrete and wood seats adjacent to the church wall.

Visitors to Wales will invariably find—as George Borrow did—that for every chapel or church there would be found a public house. Here in Gateshead, however, this is certainly not the case for whereas Trinity Church is, I believe, the sole edifice devoted to Christian kudos and glorification in the whole of High Street, there can be counted, by any curious sightseer at least 30 public bars, and, some say, more like 40, all more or less rubbing shoulders together, and all within a space of roughly a quarter of a mile, extending on each side of the said church, from which it can be plainly understood that the Gateshead labourer prefers his poison in a potent form, instead of partaking, of a Sunday, the parson's sour nectar, from a dried-up goat skin.

Strangely enough, J. B. Priestley, for all his harsh and sometimes pungent criticism of Gateshead (as revealed in Chapter 9 of his illuminating English Journey of 1933), fails to make mention of the many curious and ill-assorted public houses which I have referred to, nor does he mention anything upon priest-craft or the part the latter has taken in keeping Gateshead in the vicious condition it has devolved into, nor does Priestley even mention that its ratepayers and councillors have no boast to make concerning their having any share whatever in municipal public utility enterprises. Gateshead people may have plenty of bars, but they possess not their own transport, gas or electric production. This illustrious author did proceed to declare that the town is a "frontier camp of bricks and mortar, but no Golden West has been opened up by its activities . . . The answer being that the place is but a dormitory for the working class, of which the young men were a very mixed lot, some looked very clean, neat and healthy, others were very grimy and seedy specimens."

These latter gentry I may say—the modern product of the disgraceful mass of back-to-back slums, unhappy and vicious environment, ill-educated, rough and coarse as they actually are, inculcated with those fanatically religious doctrines and dogmas acquired at their places of school learning, mostly I should judge, under the domination of Catholic teachers, of which the town possesses more than its fair share—form a fair majority of the patrons who habitually visit the Gateshead Sunday night variety shows. Having gained admittance, no sooner is the show on the move than these young rowdies commence to whistle, or make cat-calls, and boo, voraciously any turn which fails to humour or appeal to them—this ill-bred behaviour is habitual with them at such assemblies, and in one instance that I know of, a band leader, well known in Tyneside, had, on more than one occasion to stop his band in the middle of a selection owing to the noisy clamour emanating from a certain rowdy element in the audience. If, therefore, such riff-raff will set out to spoil a concert, they will in all probability do the same should movie shows become established, and for all we know such hooliganism may be deliberately organised by certain religious fanatics in the background, designed to render such shows unpopular and unacceptable as a useful form of Sunday evening recreation or entertainment.

Having said that, we had better pass along to the top of the High Street. I have something of interest to show you before I can close this narrative. A few minutes walk over the rising ground to the south-west takes us up Belle Vue Terrace, at the top of which we strike the main continuation of the Great North Road.

Just a few yards along, set off from the road by a mean and desolate shrubbery on our left is to be seen that gaunt and very unsightly building once known as Abbott's Memorial Schools. It rears itself hideously and resembles a penitentiary with its gloomy array of narrow windows guarded in its dismal length by no less than twelve gables. I can well imagine, back in those bad old days, pious old Mrs. Abbott glowing with unctuous pride as she laid the foundation stone with a silver trowel presented to her by the Mayor on behalf of the citizens, but she cannot have dreamed what an abrupt change would one day take place, when the building would cease to be a ragged and industrial school for paupers and come to be devoted, as it is to-day, to the job of exploiting the activities of a chain-store grocery combine who provide "dividends" by means of "trading stamps."

But now, by turning the other way and casting your eyes over to the other side of the main road, I am able to point out the laughing-stock of Gateshead, colloquially known by everyone hereabouts as "Amen Corner," or as some prefer to dub it, "Bible Corner," a rather haggard place this, and somewhat seedy, down at heel and shabby! This appellation is very apt, its curious "trade-mark" being due to the existence of three churches, each so close to the other that they appear to be treading on the other's heels. Actually they form the apexes of a triangle, but one notices that none of them face the same way. The squat stone Baptist Chapel is typical of its class with its round-shouldered looking roof, and its main entrance facing to the North. Its placarded announcement board bears the curious notice of a sermon upon "Christ and the Vatican" and, round the corner on another board is the coming subject for a sermon "Christ and Death." Turn your back upon this holy clap-trap and now cross north-east over the tram lines. Here, occuping a triangular island site of its own stands the one and only Belle Vue Methodist Church-cum-Gateshead Brotherhood, another of those pious edifices, this time built of brick with sham gothic windows, surrounded by a scrubby and unkempt shrubbery, a graveyard for old tram tickets and other bits of unsightly litter. The main entrance to this holy pile faces due south, and its prominently placed announcement board invites all to "come and be welcomed at the Brotherhood meetings and join in the singing, all friends welcome." A favourite place this is still, judging by the ranting and shouting to be heard o' Sundays where the respectable and gullible devotees gather, doubtless in sadly reduced numbers, but still possessed of much arrogant virtue to sing hymns to advertise their eminent respectability.

But come! Turn your back on this unmusical festival, face again across the tram lines due west, and gaze on the priceless relic of the past, which is or was the one-time glory of the Presbyterian "truth seekers," who, having eventually proved that their path to the truth lay with despair, finally sounded the last reveille and quietly stole away in the night leaving their precious monument to face decay and final dissolution. This is the most imposing sight of the three temples under our survey. It has a certain charm, with its grey fabric of moss-coloured

stone, and its very tall and rather delicate steeple. As it has absolutely nothing at all in common with its neighbours, its main porch faces due east. At the beginning of the war it took on a new lease of life—one most decidedly not competitive with its neighbours—by becoming a vast depository for A.R.P. equipment and the like. Another exodus took place when "peace came back" as it soon became denuded entirely of its surplus bedding, furniture, and whatnot, to pass in turn into still another class of trade, by becoming the official local headquarters of the Ministry of Food. A dull green painted sign outside the porch emphasises this, and to-day, it is thronged by an endless procession of women citizens bent upon having their many rationing difficulties eased by the patient hands of the small army of "priestesses" who reign there, completely indifferent to its defunct virtues which it wielded in days of yore, and which concludes my tour around these aged "caravan relics" with disgrace abounding!

North or South of the Tyne, you Geordies, dinna forget the cause! Seek out your badges. Polish them up and wear them proudly and rally again wholeheartedly and joyfully and thus show everyone up hereabouts that Freethinkers can and will strut their ends in defiance of fools who worship whims and follow fashions regardless of reason or truth.

J. KEDGY BELLEW.

TRUTH — THE INDEFINABLE

ON Boxing Day three friends of mine, in a somewhat philosophical frame of mind (possibly an anti-climax resulting from the events of the previous day), started a long conversation which embraced nearly everything from Ghengiz Khan to Theology. In the absence of suitable pseudonyms I will call them A, B, and C. They discovered that the topic of theology brought about a considerable use of the words "the Truth." Much consternation was caused when A asked B, who had just delivered a long sermon on Roman Catholicism as the one true Christianity, what was his definition of the Truth? He further offered a large sum of money to anyone who could give a feasible definition of what he called "the elusive quality."

It was C who started the ball rolling with the none too original remark that truth was precisely what each and every individual thought it was. Needless to say this was too vague for A. Both he and B made several shots, but they simply could not find exactly what they were looking for. The general remark in turning down a suggestion was that it was too abstract. After having about a dozen ideas turned down, B came out with the slightly sarcastic reply that what we were trying was to make something concrete out of an abstract thing. A then put forward the following:—

> "We all have our opinions of ourselves; these are generally quite distorted and always totally incorrect. If we wish to know what we really are we ask a friend, and if he is honest we get a straight and honest answer which can be taken as correct. Falsity, then, is yourself as you see yourself; and Truth is you as you are seen by others."

This did not satisfy B who gave this:—

> "Truth is indefinable because we have never seen it. We can say that it is the opposite of anything untrue, but besides being a weak pun, that is an absurd statement which leads us nowhere. Men are always prating about truth and honesty, yet there are nowhere a greater bunch of hypocrites than men. We are trying to define that which we cannot see. I for one am a little cynical when talking of Truth. I see lies on every side of me, I see politicians and parsons squabbling, fighting, and betraying, and all in the name of Truth. I can only misquote and say, 'Oh Truth, what crimes have been committed in thy name!' As I see it Truth is a statesman's answer to every accusation; it is the theologian's catch-phrase in answer to every query; and it has been so much distorted, twisted, and mis-used, that like the word 'instinct' it has lost all sense and is devoid of all meaning."

There is much to be said for that statement.

FRANCIS I. GOULD.

CORRESPONDENCE

FREETHINKING AND FREE EXPRESSION.

SIR,—If, in addition to advocating freedom of thought, you allow freedom of expression, the following modernised version of Longfellow's "Psalm of Life" should be placed before your readers. The advice contained therein is, as even you must admit, very sound:—

THE BALM OF LIFE.

Tell me not in thoughtful numbers
Souls are but an empty dream,
That the mind is dead that slumbers,
That things are just what they seem.

Life is short and sometimes earnest!
Then—an infinite Hereafter!
"Dust thou art, to dust returnest!"
Then—for souls unending laughter!

Happiness instead of sorrow
Will reward us on our way,
If we act, that each to-morrow
Shows more yes-men than to-day.

Art is strong, and Time is fleeting,
Let our hearts then, though not brave,
Still, like noisy drums when beating,
Make us boldly rant and rave.

In Religion's endless battle
For control of human life,
Be just like dumb, driven cattle,
Free from risks of mental strife!

Trust the Future, 'twill be pleasant!
Let the dead Past just stay dead!
Act as if the fleeting Present
Leads you to a God o'erhead!

Words of great men oft remind us
Truth is best left marking time;
Faith and ignorance can blind us,
Bringing happiness sublime.

Blind Belief can always smother
Doubts that foul Life's fretful main;
See that if a doubting brother
Seeks for Truth—he seeks in vain!

Let us then be up and doing:
Doing those who keep construing
Revelations as home-brewing
For the profits thence accruing.

Benedicite, Frater! Valeat quantum valere potest!—Yours, etc.

PIOUS I. (S. Africa).

CHILDREN AND RELIGION.

Sir,—It was with interest I read the letter to a "Freethinking Father" in your last issue of "The Freethinker."

The question of withdrawing children from religious instruction in schools is not so easy and so simple as your correspondent would have your readers believe.

At one period of my life I thought it would be a simple matter to do so, and I was determined that my children would be spared the religious dope that I was inflicted with during my early days. But I soon realised however that there were other things to be considered that I had overlooked when stressing the point that religious teaching in schools was both harmful and contrary to the principles of democracy.

Many quarrels I have had with my wife over this question, and the strain became so great that rather than break up an otherwise very happy home life I gave way, and as much as I detest the religious dope, etc., my children are given religious teaching at school.

Other things also have to be taken into account, such as: I live opposite a Sunday school which to attract and keep the children offer treats, concerts, outings, and so on. Children do not realise what is behind all this; but who could listen to the pleadings of his children to join their playmates without being affected?

I am an Atheist and everyone in the district knows it, but I'm not one who must inflict his own will on others. I have my home life to consider and consequently first things must come first.

In conclusion I might add that in my own way I counteract the evil of religious teaching that my children receive at school by putting the Secular case so that they hear and understand both sides.

I am happy at the moment to record that my efforts have been successful and I believe that my children knowing both sides will be all the better for it.—Yours, etc.,

A. Baron.

AN APPRECIATION.

Sir,—I have been a constant reader of "The Freethinker" now for more than three years, and a confirmed Atheist for two years. I was, until that time, as ardent a believer in God and Christ to be found anywhere between the two poles.

Firmly convinced that all Atheists were libertines, madmen, sexual perverts and abandoned profligates I squared my conscience by never arguing religion on the ground of impiety.

Curiosity attracted me to my first "Freethinker," doubt impelled me to read a second; enthusiasm and earnest conviction inspired me to place a regular order. Since that epoch-making day (speaking personally) many avenues of enlightenment have been explored by a mind with a wholly changed outlook upon existence.

I offer my thanks, Sir, to you, and to that host of pioneer Freethinkers whose recognition has yet to come. I set the approximate date of that recognition one hundred years hence. That may appear pessimistic. I hardly think that it is.

Only too obviously the Church and religion are losing their grip upon the people, but a deeply rooted superstitious and religious awe remains which cannot be dispelled at a moment's notice. No, religion will live on for a while yet, perhaps in obscurity in the latter stages, but nevertheless it will persist until the last vestiges of superstition and holy terror have been extirpated.—Yours, etc.,

R. Bowes.

THE AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY.

Sir,—In a recent issue of "The Freethinker," "S. H." writes:—

"Apart from Spain, which I have already mentioned, there is the fact that in the 1939-45 war the machine *was* largely run by the workers themselves. The British aircraft industry, as I was recently informed by a technician in one of the biggest of its factories, was entirely in the hands of charge-hands and foremen. Many of the amendments to the bombers were put into effect in the finished products weeks and months before engineering designs were available. A shortage of skilled draughtsmen made it necessary, if a machine was to appear on schedule, to produce it without drawings. And this was often done."

I venture to suggest that these comments are a gross exaggeration and a misstatement of the facts relative to the Aircraft Industry. The term "largely run by the workers themselves" applies to a few instances only—insignificant to the total number of factories. In the incorporation of amendments (technically known as modifications) the statement is wholly at variance with the facts. The draughtsman is the only person who knows what is required. There is, perhaps, only one case in a thousand where an article is made before it is drawn. This occurs when a specialised piece of equipment is required and the fitter is given instructions to make one to suit. If it passes inspection and conforms to the stress necessary it is drawn and recorded. But this arrangement only applies to aircraft which have been in service and are returned to factory for repairs, modifications, etc. New aircraft cannot be built that way. We should have been in a sorry plight otherwise.—Yours etc.,

S. Gordon Hogg.

THE RELIGION OF ALL SENSIBLE MEN.

Sir,—In your issue of January 20, you attribute the well-known quip on this subject to Lord Chesterfield. It was current before Chesterfield was heard of. Burnet in his "History of My Own Time" attributes it to the first Lord Shaftesbury, leader of the Whig Party in the reign of Charles II.

It has been credited to Chesterfield, Disraeli and Wilde, but I believe Burnet's ascription is the earliest.—Yours, etc.,

Archibald Robertson.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—Outdoor

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

LONDON—Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Archibald Robertson, M.A.: "The Role of Rationalism in Progress." Conway Discussion Circle. Tuesday, 7 p.m., Majorie Bowen: "The Dangers of Enthusiasm."

COUNTRY—Indoor

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 13, 38, John Bright Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: "Spiritism": various speakers, "For and Against." Tea at 5 p.m.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public Lecture Halls, Northgate, Blackburn).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. Clayton (Burnley): "The Persistence of Religion."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., E. V. Tempest, D.S.O., M.C.: "Religious Anti-Soviet Propaganda."

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Hall, Old Arcade, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. R. H. Rosetti: "God and the Atomic Bomb."

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

Price 2d. each. Postage 1d. each.

THE PIONEER PRESS

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

Printed and Published by the Pioneer Press (G. W. Foote and Company Limited), 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.