

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Compulsory Religion

WHERE stupidity reigns the success of common sense and justice makes but a slow advance. Everyone is aware that the majority of men in the Army and Navy have a very strong dislike to Church parades. This has been the case so long as Church parades have been in existence. Relief was given in late years. The Law permits men in the Army, Navy and Air Force to write opposite the query "religion" the plain but decisive word "none." That should have relieved those who so register themselves. So it would, but for several considerations. The first is that many men are still unaware of their right to declare "none." In the next place they are often put through an examination that is quite illegal. As with a Court of Law, a Judge has no right to put a witness through an examination when he "affirms" instead of swearing over a Bible. But we have heard of a man in the Forces being examined by an officer as to why he did not believe in *some* religion, and unless the man has moral courage, backed with understanding of his legal rights, he is likely to be talked out of his rights. A religious recruit may have enquiries as to his religion. The Atheist or Freethinker need only write the simple word "none."

In the case of Church parades, a man who is written down "no religion" should be released, and will be released, from Church attendance as an unbeliever. But the matter does not end there. In a Church parade the Freethinker can refuse to enter the Church and take part in the ceremonies, but he cannot refuse to march with other men, and then he is left hanging about while others are in the Church, and finally he joins the men on leaving the Church, and marches back with them. It makes a better show.

Still we have not done with this ridiculous method of making men religious. The objector to Church may not be marched to the Church. He may be left behind, but not to rest, to read, or to walk. Very thoughtfully his superiors look out some very objectionable piece of work and a job that keeps the man very busy, often long after the other men have returned and indulge in poking fun at the "conscientious objector." The result is that many a man who is registered "Religion, none," and who wishes to indulge in mental honesty, soon gets to realise that honesty of speech has to be paid for in this country. We are pleased to say that the number of men who have now registered "religion, none," are getting so numerous that the punishment is not so easily inflicted.

There is, of course, only one way of securing freedom of thought in the Army. This is not to take a Freethinking recruit and hand him over to someone who does not at all understand what Freethought means and why men believe it to be important enough to fight for, but to take

the man's statement as final. I recall one case that is worth repeating. A Freethinker had decided to enter the Army, it was in the early days of the war that was to end all war—1914. The usual question came: "What religion?" The question followed with an interview with a young officer. He may have been quite a good man at his own job. But my friend described him as having no more knowledge of Freethought than a cow has of astronomy. Still, he was a decent character, because he at length agreed that the man should be docketed as "No religion."

And now the question of freedom of thought inside the Army as well as outside has come to the front again—this time in the House of Commons. It was raised by Mr. Driberg, Member for Maldon, in the annual discussion of the Army Navy and Air Force (Annual) Bill. Mr. Driberg moved a new clause dealing with "Attendance at Church Parade." It ran thus:—

"Notwithstanding anything contained in the Army or Air Force Act, or any order or regulation or disciplinary instruction published for the information and guidance of the Army or Royal Air Force, no person subject to Military Law or to the Air Force Act shall be compelled to attend any Church parade or religious service."

That is a good Bill, although in the end it was not adopted, but it is something to know that two hundred members backed the Motion, and that represented only those who had signed the Motion. At any rate, the framing of it could not be objected to except by such men as Sir W. Darling, who appears to belong—certainly where religion is concerned—to the England of 300 years ago. He made the discovery that the soldier was "a dedicated man. He is a man who has dedicated himself to the service of his God, his King and his country. He has sworn on oath and we cannot divest him from that sense of religion which is embodied in that decision . . . Is the Secretary of State for War to deny them the right to worship together?"

Now I am quite sure that this will come with astonishment to eleven soldiers out of every dozen, but it is not a bad sample of those who raised an objection to so simple and so just an appeal as that made in the Motion by Mr. Driberg. No one has the slightest desire to prevent any soldier going to Church, or saying his prayers, and all will be rather surprised that he is more a "dedicated man" than the man who goes down a pit, or who puts his last shilling on a sure thing at a racecourse.

Against a back number such as Sir W. Darling, we might well put Mr. Vernon Bartlett, who said that the justice of the suggested clause was so obvious that the Government might be counted on to adopt it. But in the end the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Lawson, asked for the clause to be withdrawn, but promised in turn to consider the matter. He said he believed that "whether

he be a soldier or civilian he should be free to worship God in his own way, and as far as possible in his own time." On which the member for Hammersmith interjected "or not at all, if he feels so inclined." That really touched the core of the whole discussion. But the Minister ignored the issue indicated in the interjection, and gave his listeners a fairly soapy sermonette by saying, "I cannot think that in the long run this freedom can exist, nor do I believe that religion can flourish in an atmosphere of compulsion or restraint. I do not think that compulsion could ultimately be in the interests of the Churches, nor to the advantage of the Service Chaplains, nor right for the individual officer or soldier."

Mr. Lawson should read a little history, or, if he has read, think whether religious systems have ever flourished in an atmosphere of freedom. Christianity was built up by force. That is as plain as any chapter of history that one can read. And it is maintained by force to-day—not, of course, the force of direct pressure in the shape of imprisonment or torture or suppression of counter opinions. And what is true of Christianity is true of every one of the great religious systems of the world. There have been degrees of force, and differing qualities of punishment or suppression or terrorism, but the force has been there. If one were expectant of complete truth either with politics or religion—and I admit that neither truth nor fair play are very prominent with either—one might put the question "What chance would most men have of getting into Parliament if they were openly declared Atheists?" Bradlaugh did, but he was one man among a thousand. And what would happen in the Army or Navy to an officer who gave some of the men under him copies of the "Free-thinker" and other Atheist books? Mr. Lawson must be as well-acquainted as I am. Feeling that his ground is not very strong, and that the promises made to induce the withdrawal of the new clause suggested, to his faint promises he added "It may well be that we shall want to retain the right of ordering parades in connection with religious services on certain national or local occasions." That leaves us almost where we were beforehand—so far as the Minister is concerned. Still, Mr. Driberg has done well in bringing into daylight the truth that the same decay of religion that is going on among civilians is going on among the Army. It could not be otherwise. The nature of war has changed, and modern warfare involves a more alert mind, some understanding of mechanics, and also—perhaps the most important of all, the development of a quicker and deeper intellectuality.

I may well add here a passage from the Roman Catholic "Catholic Herald"—

"We are in sympathy with the M.P.s who are struggling to have compulsory Church parades abolished. Catholics only recognise one compulsion to worship and pray, God's compulsion and the compulsion of those whom Catholics know to be acting in God's name. It is not Caesar's generals and colonels. And where Church parade falls on men who in their hearts have no religion, or no religion corresponding to the one in whose interests they are paraded, religion is turned into a farce for the greater glory of Caesar and his armies."

That in itself is a good comment on Christian ethics.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A DEFENCE OF THE RESURRECTION

V

MR. ARNOLD LUNN, in his "The Third Day," makes great play with the "empty tomb," as a proof that Jesus must have arisen after being put to death. He even goes to the well-known "Sepher Toldeth Jeschu," which he calls a "strange by-product of irrational hatred" and which he admits was a "medieval life of Jesus," as another wonderful proof that the Jews themselves "had been forced to admit that the tomb was empty," and therefore the Resurrection was a fact. Why the Jews should have an "irrational" hatred of the Christians after having been put to death, tortured, imprisoned, looted, by Mr. Lunn's fellow-believers for nigh on 1,000 years, seems to surprise him; but why this Jewish "life" of Jesus should be put up as irrefutable evidence that a miracle had taken place, can only be known to Mr. Lunn. It required brains to think over that one. Obviously, if the writers of the New Testament were showing that Jesus had arisen, the "empty tomb" was as necessary for the plot as the Crucifixion. Both are just mere fictions.

When we come to the "testimony" of Paul, as we always do—the testimony is brought up just as avidly by Rationalists trying to prove that Jesus was a Man—we find, if we read the Epistles, that Paul was contending for a God. The famous passage in Corinthians shows how many people saw Jesus after he rose from the dead, including the 500 brethren at once; and I am quite sure that if Paul had written 50,000, or even 5 millions, we would have had Christians—and even some Rationalists—claiming that this witness of Paul was unanswerable.

Anyone reading Gerald Massey's pamphlet on Paul as the Gnostic opponent of Peter, would get a good idea of what Paul really believed; his Jesus was a "heavenly being," a purely Gnostic conception, and quite unhistorical. He was a God—and I have always maintained even with Mr. Lunn that Jesus was a God. Of course, we do differ a little, as I contend that the Godhead of Jesus was like that of Jupiter or Horus—and we know that they are both myths.

In discussing "miracles—without Christianity," Mr. Lunn goes on one of his favourite subjects, Spiritualism. He doesn't believe, and he doesn't believe, though I always feel that any body who can believe in the return of Jesus from Summerland—or was it Hell?—ought to swallow the wholesale resurrection of Spiritualism without a qualm. But why call the famous medium, D. D. Home, "David" Home or "Daniel Douglas Home"? Surely the way he spelt his name himself—Daniel Douglas Home—would be at least more uniform. As for the various spiritualistic "phenomena," such as the "paraffin gloves," this is not the place to deal with them; but here again I am struck with the childishness and naivete shown by Mr. Lunn whenever he comes across any trick he cannot understand. There is a very simple explanation of the paraffin gloves which almost any conjurer knows.

But after dealing with telepathy and other phenomena in a way which makes one understand what "sitting on the fence" means, and which appears to me to be dragged in only to confound the "materialists," and which have literally nothing to do with the Resurrection, Mr. Lunn comes to the conclusion that we don't believe it, not because of the lack of evidence, but because of our "invincible prejudice." Now why should we be prejudiced? We were all, or nearly all, brought up to believe in Christianity, and even though some of our teachers did not press too much on belief in Devils and Angels, or even of the Virgin Birth, the one thing which was never questioned was the Resurrection. That was taught us as absolutely indisputable. What made us eventually come to class it with the similar stories of other Gods?

On that Mr. Lunn is silent. He thinks Christian apologists are too "apologetic." They should make us define our own beliefs. Well, I am always ready to do that, though I fail to see even if I could not, how that proves the Resurrection to non-Christians. Even were "natural selection" proved untrue, even though Materialism were to give place to Idealism, even though Freud was completely overthrown—we still would have no proof of the Resurrection, not even that Jesus Christ was any different from Osiris.

Nothing is easier than at the end of a book in defence of Christianity in general, or of the Resurrection in particular, to write as Mr. Lunn does, that the "evidence for Christianity is overwhelming" and the "arguments for the Resurrection are reinforced by the arguments from experience." I have only to insist on the contrary, and then where are we? There is simply no evidence for the truth of Christianity, and certainly none, either in the incoherent and contradictory accounts of the gospels, or from experience, for the truth of the Resurrection. In the end, Mr. Lunn falls back upon Fr. D'Arcy—supposed to be the great gun of Roman Catholics this day. In obscure theological quarrels no doubt Fr. D'Arcy could hold his own; but when it comes to a concrete argument he is just as childish as Mr. Lunn. Let me quote him:

Mr. Kingsley Martin places side by side the birth and death of a god in the mystery religions with the life and death of Christ on Cavalry. He leaves us to understand that the two are comparable . . . The gods of the mystery religions are figments of the imagination, whereas Christ was at least a real man who lived and died. The Christian also says that He rose from the dead. If Mr. Kingsley Martin would come to grips with that article of the Creed instead of dipping into Frazer, his argument would be less shadowy.

For sheer futile "argument" I can fancy nothing much siller than this coming as it does from one of the supposed great minds in the Church. Note how "Christ," that is, the "Messiah," the "Anointed One," is just "a real man" (small m); but when the "real man" rose from the dead, his pronoun is made to have a capital "H." It reminds me of the way Dr. F. C. Conybeare thought he was proving to J. M. Robertson that Jesus was a real man who lived and died, by calling him the "Historical Christ." Naturally, Fr. D'Arcy does not stop to prove that Jesus was a real man. That must never be questioned.

Then in talking of the gods of the mystery religions, Mr. Martin was "dipping" into Frazer—not for worlds would these people hint that he might have been dipping into Robertson. How little Fr. D'Arcy knows of Frazer can be judged from the fact that, at least in the "Golden Bough," Frazer expressly declared his belief in a real man Jesus. The non-historicity of Jesus Christ must never be hinted at when a priest is trying to answer a Freethinker.

As a matter of fact, it is just this point that Fr. D'Arcy, a little more shrewd than Mr. Lunn, knows he dare not discuss. The whole fabric of Christianity stands or falls with the actual existence of Jesus Christ, in the ultimate. Long ago, Dupuis saw that. "Once I give in to you that there was a man," he said, in effect, "called Jesus, and you have gained a tremendous point, for you will not stop there. You will argue for a God." That is exactly what Fr. D'Arcy does. Jesus was a "real man" but "He" rose from the dead. Freethinkers must ever be on their guard against this subtle form of making them accept without argument just what has to be proved.

Mr. Lunn's book has naturally received a good religious press because Christians are not obliged to read it, they already believe. And those who do not believe, will see in it only another fatuous attempt, one of thousands, to prove historical a purely Gnostic figment of the imagination.

I am not surprised after reading it that Mr. Lunn had no time for a debate.

H. CUTNER.

KARL MARX OR JESUS?

FOR the most part Christians of the more earnest type have tried to ignore Karl Marx; for the most part Freethinkers, even though they did not always accept his theories in their entirety, have realised that he did at any rate make a serious effort to understand the way the world was going and to provide a sensible explanation of it.

A new book, however, gives us what is almost the first discussion, from a position of Christian orthodoxy, of the Marxist ideology. It is entitled, "The Christian Significance of Karl Marx," it is written by Alexander Miller, and it is published at six shillings by the Student Christian Movement Press. There is, indeed, something especially noteworthy about the fact that it appears just now. Clearly students (and the educated classes generally), to whom the publication of the book may be expected particularly to appeal, are thinking more in Marxist terms and less in Christian terms than they have done in the past. Consequently the book may be taken as an attempt to win back some erring sinners to the fold.

What struck me about it is that the first half is exceptionally well contrived. Mr. Miller does his best to show what Marxism means, and he is highly successful in that endeavour. Indeed, I cannot recall another book of such small compass which explains Marxist economics so well. He also deals straightforwardly enough with some of the outstanding critics, such as John Macmurry, John Middleton Murry, and Arthur Koestler, who have disagreed with the general Marxist approach.

Where he fails (and all Freethinkers will agree that he must inevitably fail) is in trying to hitch his Christian wagon to the Marxist star. He tries to show the relevance of Marxism to Christianity, and he fails completely and lamentably in this attempt. Indeed, the contrast between the concrete proposals of the early pages and the vague idealism of the latter pages is the most striking feature of the book.

There can be no doubt at all, after reading a book like this, that religion is slowly dying. It tries to find a way out of the dilemma presented by the creeds of the political prophets like Marx. If it were not Marx it would be Godwin or Kropotkin or Engels or Henry George. And in all cases the failure would be the same. Religion is other-worldly in its emphasis; politics must, from their very nature, be this-worldly. And no casuistry will suffice to reconcile the two.

S. H.

MATILDA ROALFE.

A brave woman, born 1813. At the time of the blasphemy prosecutions in 1843, she went from London to Edinburgh to uphold the right of free publication. She opened a shop and circulated a manifesto setting forth her determination to sell works she deemed useful "whether they did or did not bring into contempt the Holy Scriptures and the Christian Religion." When prosecuted for selling "The Age of Reason," "The Oracle of Reason," she expressed her intention of continuing her offence as soon as liberated. She was sentenced to two months' imprisonment 23rd January, 1844, and on her liberation continued the sale of the prosecuted works. She afterwards married Mr. Walter Sanderson, and settled at Galashiels, where she died 29th November, 1880.

"RENKLUAUF."

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

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

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

ACID DROPS

The "Northern Whig" (Belfast) announces, on the authority of a member of the "Ulster Commons," that the Bible will soon be in every school in Ulster. We had the opinion that the Bible was already well established in Protestant schools, and by tuition in the Catholic schools also. Up to the present we cannot say that the use of the Bible by those two groups has made men and women more truthful, more useful, and better with the Bible than they would have been without it. In fact, the outstanding quality of Bible influence is to give people another and a stronger reason for hating each other.

Digging in the bombed cloisters of the House of Commons there was found a number of skulls dating back to the fifteenth century. This is very interesting, but quite as interesting is the fact that we have—in both the upper and lower House—active skulls that are still with us.

The Pope has called upon the Catholics of South America to help the starving people of parts of Europe by sending along food. The appeal is good for as far as it goes, but the Pope is missing a great chance. Why doesn't he induce some of the angels to use their power by sending a rain of food where it is to-day so solidly needed? Good Catholics believe that only a few years back "Holy Mary" induced agents to take the sun from its orbit and give a miracle to Europe. Sending bread from heaven would be child's play to causing the sun to dance a "can-can" in front of a large body of people.

There is a Christian method of preventing war which is laid down in the New Testament. It is that when a man smites you on one cheek you should turn to him the other. But somehow the Christian philosophy—in practice—consists in getting in the first blow quickly, when circumstances warrant it. Now a North London preacher, of the Totteridge Union Church, has developed another method. He says that when Christians are called to fight they "should refuse the act of war and all preparations of war." Well, that seems quite clear. If everybody refuses to fight there can be no more war. The genius of Christianity will not be crushed.

Nothing seems so well warranted to cheer us up in these troublesome days as a good dose of Christianity. Some people are worrying over the possibility of a constant series of wars, the last one always the worst in its making way for another last war. But our fears are coming to an end. Pastor Bradbury of West Croydon reveals the news—fresh from God—that there will be wars—each using the fashionable Atomic bombs—and the last "world shaking" will be in August, 1953. Then Jesus will come—probably to see how his worshippers turn one cheek when the other is smitten.

It is reported that the Emperor of Japan has decided to join one of the Christian religions. But he is undecided as to whether he shall be a Roman Catholic or a Protestant. It is said that not only does the Emperor intend becoming a convert, but he wants his people to realise the blessings of Christianity. But we do not believe that a colossal atom bomb will hang in the Church in which the Emperor converses with God. That is a pity, for the Emperor was a God, and when he and the other God exchange opinions on the trials of being a God, the conversation should be very interesting. We expect also that the Emperor will give a hint that if he had got the bomb first he would never have swapped deities.

"The Sunday Mail" announces an instance "of prayers being answered." An old lady was sitting in a lonely place—feeling more lonely than usual. She told God how lonely she was, etc. She had just got off her knees when the door opened and her daughter with her child came in. Now, for promptness, that beats everything. In fact, it was too prompt. The old lady, or the newspaper, forgot to allow time for her daughter to open the door. We have no great objection to a liar, but time should have been allowed by the "Sunday Mail" for the visitors going

from one place to another. Although we do not claim to be an expert at the game we could do better than the "Mail" has done. But what kind of readers does the "Mail" get?

Our Sabbatarians are not the only kill-joys in this vale of tears. They have formidable rivals in the Irish Temperance Alliance which is very angry with the B.B.C. for mentioning drink too often on the air—no doubt feeling that Itma's famous colonel, for instance, is not the awful example he should be, but a delightful advertisement for the joys of getting drunk on every possible occasion. At the annual meeting of the Alliance, Mr. Burps, who moved the resolution of protest, proudly declared that he seldom listened in—so of course he should know. We suggest now that vegetarians should protest to the B.B.C. against all cookery lessons in which meat is included, Baptists against all mention of playing-cards or games because they are of the Devil, the No-Betting Brigade against giving the results of racing because it encourages a little flutter with a book-maker, and so on. Why don't the kill-joys agitate for the B.B.C. to be run entirely by themselves?

Roman Catholicism always insists that this religion has no colour bar, that all are equal in Christ. Yet when the "Universal" was asked the other day whether an African native, though a Catholic, was turned out of a Catholic Church in London "on the ground that it was a white man's church," the reply was, "We must suspend our judgment." It might have been done, we are unctuously told, "as a temporary concession to racial prejudice." We are not told whose racial prejudice, but of course, it was Catholic racial prejudice. The African convert, in fact, will learn through bitter experience exactly what his religion is worth.

Of all the unjust practices that follow religion "like the night the day," the tax put upon Sunday Cinemas is the most unjust. From every cinema there is taken from the owners a special sum of money because they are open on "the Lord's Day." Why? The pictures shown are of the same kind that appear during the week. They are not better than those shown on week-days—generally they are not so good. But the special tax is levied. The clergy do not object to the tax, on the contrary, they consider it a very good thing. They do not call the money taken wicked money, or tainted money; it is money, and that is enough. Our lives are fairly well filled with humbug, but when it is connected with religion it reaches the top. We are not surprised that the "Yorkshire Post" says: "The reason given for the holding of Sunday film showings in Leeds is that provision is needed for the entertainment of young people on Sunday evenings to keep them from parading the streets and frequenting undesirable places and getting into mischief. If the ratepayers are convinced that the innovation can be justified on these grounds, then the exhibitors may be held to be performing a public service." Anything that breaks up the delusion of a sacred day is performing a public service, but the Government that kowtows to the Churches penalises those who break one of the most stupid of features of the Christian creed.

Everyone is aware that the peace of Europe cannot be attained with Russia being outside the circle. But the Roman Church will count it as nothing if Russia and Britain become firm friends. At present we are a long way off that. In the United States of America, the Roman Church wields much power—so much religiously as politically. For example, there is Rev. J. Cronin, who wields considerable power, warning his followers, and others, that they must take notice that Russia is planning to overrun Europe to obtain slave labour for her factories, with the ultimate object of a Communist France invading Spain, and a Communist power controlling Gibraltar.

Before the war, the Roman Catholics in America seemed to divide their time between the Jews and the Russians. One priest had an enormous following on the radio, and his tirade was almost always that it was the Jews who were out to conquer the world. Never, never is it the Roman Catholics!

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SUGAR PLUMS

We deal with the general question of religion and the Armed Forces on the front page of this issue of "The Freethinker," but there is much more to be said on the subject. Here, for example, is part of a letter published in the "Daily Herald" for April 6. The letter is signed by J. W. Hayden, R.A.P.C., B.A.O.R. He says:—

"Here in B.A.O.R. we are obliged by order of Field-Marshal Montgomery to sign a register monthly, stating whether or not we have attended church once during the month.

"The whole affair reaches a farcical anti-climax when one is dragged on to a church parade for another denomination, if sufficient numbers are not available, admittedly on these occasions to the church door only."

All the talk of men being at liberty drops to mere humbug when one hears that there is freedom of opinion where religion is concerned. Thousands—many hundreds of thousands—would dispense with church attendances if they were able to do as they please. The mere parading of men and telling them that they need not go into the Church is surely humbug. If the men in the Forces are to play the part of full-blooded independent individuals, going to Church should be so expressed by the men themselves. And the Church parade should be abolished. Field-Marshal Montgomery's order to know, month by month, who does or does not attend Church should be dropped, voluntarily if possible, but dropped.

Blackpool readers will have the opportunity of hearing Mr. J. T. Brighton, who brings to a close the course of lectures in the Alexander Cafe, Victoria Street, Blackpool, to-day, with a lecture at 2-30 p.m., on "Civilised Savagery," and at 6-30 p.m., on "Jesus Christ—What think ye of Him?" The local saints can be relied upon to make it a real good wind-up as far as they are concerned and there is no doubt about the ability of the speaker to do his part well.

We are a democratic people. All our leaders—Conservatives, who were once hard Tories, Roman Catholics, who are bound to take a degree from a Pope who derives authority from God, and so on. Naturally in such conditions every man may have whatever religion he likes, or go about without any. It is a fine picture exhibiting man at his best, and at his noblest. And yet there are certain drawbacks. For example: if a man wishes to go to a theatre on Sunday—which is the one day in the week when a man can do so in the greatest comfort—he finds he is locked out because certain people do not like Sunday performances—save such as take place in a Church. It is all so very democratic.

A JIGSAW IS TAKING SHAPE

TRAVELLING around the country rather more than usual during the present indoor season, and coupling my experiences with recollections of various incidents during the last summer season, I seem to have detected many indications of a quickening of interest in the Freethought movement.

Unlike the religious enthusiast, who is always ready to talk joyfully about the religious revival that is just around the corner (where it seems to be permanently stationed, never managing to take the bend) I am not deluded into writing of "resurgences" and "revivals"; but I do somewhat cautiously suggest that Freethought is emerging more prominently as a factor in the social and intellectual life of the nation.

Slowly, and not without difficulty, the focal points of national thought are once again becoming individually clear, after being blurred almost beyond recognition in the dazzling blaze of war-time propaganda for six or seven years; after being dimmed like puny torches in the glare of a searchlight.

And new values are arising in consequence of the many changes that have taken place during the cultural dim-out, new conceptions are developing from the widespread broadening of experience that has come as a result of the people's grim conflict with a self-made terror that for years seemed to overwhelm humanity before it finally was got under control.

At the moment the general mood is that of picking oneself up after being thrown helplessly down to the dusty ground. Much of the dust we are shaking off is still flying around, but in the clearances we are looking for the paths we have to tread—either the old paths (which are no longer there) or new paths which indicate themselves in the light of what we have learned in the scramble.

The six years of war were somehow like the Bolton football ground tragedy. In an irrational attempt to gate-crash areas incapable of holding them, a small number of people started a mass movement of humans which became incapable of checking itself, a movement in which every individual was carried forward willy-nilly, against every personal desire or effort, until the wave of movement had worked itself out of the human mass, leaving behind a trail of death and destruction.

And at the end the readjustment! The survey of those factors which failed us in the calamity, and those which stood us in good stead. The scrapping of the failures, and the improvement of the useful.

In the national readjustment one thing stands out a mile to the common man and woman. That is, the utter failure of religion to give help or succour; the recognition by many, for the first time, that organised religions were part and parcel of the conditions which produced the calamity, and that man has nothing to hope for from religion in building up the future.

On this basis of the recognition of the futility of religion, and especially of Christianity, the more socially-minded are becoming more receptive of the fundamental truth implied in Freethought—that the salvation of man lies with man himself.

Couple this factor with certain political tendencies of the moment—tendencies that are repugnant to every liberty-loving individual—and we find established an intellectual basis upon which the truly free personality can turn only to Freethought as his hope for the future.

The political tendencies I refer to are those which seek to keep men and women, and especially youth, enchained to secular as well as religious authority, to hold them as puppets who may be ordered to dance at the whim of an authoritarian bureaucracy which seems to believe that marionette strings are good for the development of the human personality.

The disillusionment of thousands of thinking people with the trend of secular government, and the shattering of the idealistic hopes of reform via religion, are undoubtedly causing a move-

ment of social thought in the direction of Freethought; while the sight of a "progressive" Prime Minister reading lessons in a church, in direct negation of the materialistic creed he professes, and the sorry spectacle of a President of the Board of Trade trying to reorganise the country on "Christian way of life" lines, have already driven many progressives into the active Freethought camp as the last hope for the achievement of a rational and scientific human outlook.

This drift towards Freethought is discernible in many other ways, too, and the need for an independent and strong movement in the country, to counter the hypocritical policy of the politicians in paying lip-service to a creed that few of them profess, is being more and more appreciated. Old branches of the National Secular Society are being revived, and new ones are being founded, as a result of the feeling of frustration that exists regarding political policy in respect of religion.

That political materialism has virtually disappeared with the corruption of progressive movements by the Roman Catholic Church is plain for all to see; it is not quite so plain to see (to the ordinary observer) that a strong reaction to this state of affairs has now set in. One needs to get around somewhat to be able to piece up into a comprehensive pattern the jigsaw of the re-shaped opinions that are now to be discovered, sometimes in the most surprising quarters, as progressive thought once more begins to take up the trail after the six years' disturbance.

I have been getting around. I have seen the pieces falling into the pattern. And I predict that soon the Freethought movement will be far more active as a leading influence in shaping thought and guiding action into those truly progressive channels which alone can keep man culturally evolving.

The first half of this century has been remarkable for the development of scientific Atheism—an Atheism no longer based on the simple absurdity and uselessness of religion, but on the need of man for a rational approach to an understanding of himself, as well as of non-human factors. And as one who does not believe in presenting bouquets when those who deserve them cannot appreciate them, I do not hesitate to name Chapman Cohen as the brilliant leader in this development of scientific Atheism. (I forbid any editorial deletion of the foregoing paragraph.)

The next half of the 20th century will be the period in which the skilfully developed scientific Atheism that we now possess will have to be applied practically to the problems of mankind if a forward march is to be recorded in human history.

That task lies ahead. To accomplish it we need the greater strength of an ever-growing Freethought movement. The promise of that is already before us. With enthusiasm and courage on the part of those now in the movement the promise will mature.

F. J. CORINA.

SUNDAY CINEMAS IN LEEDS

FOLLOWING on the leader in "The Freethinker" for February 10, the Leeds Labour Party have reason to congratulate themselves that the stand they took in the matter of the Sunday opening of cinemas has been justified by the result of the poll taken on March 19.

The one disappointing thing is the smallness of the poll—only 38,100 voted—less than 25 per cent. of the electorate. The votes for Sunday opening were 62,962; against, 25,138; majority for, 37,824.

The two points holding interest for a Freethinker in the whole matter are—

- (a) the attitude of the local "Yorkshire Post" and
- (b) the views and claims of the local Church leaders.

(a) The Editor of the "Yorkshire Post," the day before the poll, came out against opening, saying that "to encourage additional cinema going is to increase the obstacles in the way of the wholly laudable youth movement." After the poll, the Editor hopes "that the provision of film shows to occupy those who might otherwise aimlessly wander the streets, or get into mischief, will not be the sole expedient adopted to fill the Sunday evenings of young people."

My comment, speaking with experience of Sunday evenings living in four large northern towns, is that before the coming of the cinemas, Sundays or weekdays, the churches and all the miscellaneous "uplift" organisations had it all to themselves and did practically nothing. I can well remember the Y.M.C.A. Sunday afternoon cheap teas, with religious trimmings, provided in a garrison town I lived in, with the Bible meeting as a necessary preliminary to the tea.

(b) The opposition to Sunday opening on the part of the Leeds Council of Churches shews the usual seeking for every argument against such opening but the real one, i.e., fear for their jobs. The parsonry is a vested interest and I am not blaming the parsons in their search for security, although their Master tells them to "take no thought for food or raiment or the morrow" (Matt. vi. 25-34). The Leeds Council of Churches expressed anxiety for the cinema employees losing their Sunday rest—the Leeds Sunday Cinemas Association countered with the fact that by the law of the land no cinema employee is allowed to work more than 5½ days in any given week. Such employees generally prefer Sunday opening because they will actually work fewer hours than under a six-day opening and can go to an entertainment and do their shopping on their day off.

The Leeds Council of Churches say "there is not the slightest hope of any material improvement for the people of the world unless the spirit of man once again turns back to God. Sunday provides the main opportunity for us all to strengthen ourselves spiritually for the gigantic tasks which lie ahead." Why one should wish to strengthen oneself *spiritually* to gain *material* improvement I know not; perhaps the Vicar of Leeds, the Chairman of the Leeds Council of Churches, can enlighten me.

After the poll, the Vicar of Leeds told the "Yorkshire Post": "It has been settled in a democratic way. Naturally, I regret the result, but I am quite satisfied that it has been put to the city as it should have been—in a democratic way—and the people have given a decisive verdict."

The Vice-chairman, the Rev. D. Gordon Wylie, said, "As good democrats we accept the verdict." He went on to say that opening hours would be arranged so as not to interfere with Sunday Schools—that a considerable percentage of Sunday takings would be devoted to charity and that the films shown would be of an instructional character and of a very high tone.

The hope of being able to catch the children is a very natural one—the church that stands aside from the activities of the Leeds Council of Churches could give that body points in that respect.

As to percentages to charity, I am very glad to see that the Chairman of the Leeds and District Cinematograph Exhibitors Association takes the stand that, whilst a contribution to charity is a condition of Sunday opening, any expectation that such contribution will be a big one will suffer some disappointment.

Personally, I see no more reason why Sunday receipts should be tapped for charity than should weekday receipts for the benefit of the Bible Society.

W. THURGOOD.

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

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

THE VIRTUE OF SELFISHNESS

I.

IN no ethical system has selfishness ever counted as a virtue, which is all in its favour. Far from being merely the theoretical or platitudinous cockshy of the moralists selfishness is a reality, and a necessity for the continuance of sentient life.

Not an animal or plant shows sign of any purpose but self-interest. The baby lives for himself alone, intent on absorbing nourishment, light and air and growing as healthy and vigorous as possible. That is his first duty, and as he gets older he finds, if he is intelligent, that as little departure as convenient from that attitude is advisable. Particularly so if he has brothers and sisters, for he discovers each striving to oust the others from such share of the good things of life as are made available by parental efforts.

At school selfishness becomes even more essential. There the competition is fierce, large-scale and unscrupulous. Each pupil has to fend for himself, crudely and clumsily in the infant school, more subtly but never less relenting as higher grades are reached.

Then in his teens it is borne upon the individual that life is only a dogfight, and one must snatch one's bone from the gutter before others do so.

Boys and girls who go on to grammar, secondary, technical school, and from that to college or university, develop selfishness as a fine art, one of the points in character fostered by formalised education. They discover that higher education is only a means of self-advancement; the opening for aggrandisement, one of the avenues of ambition. By education, mainly at public expense, there are soft jobs to be had, either incrementing salaries and pensions in government and municipal services, or professions with big emoluments, or commercial adventures promising ample plunder for the unscrupulous venturers. Selfishness begins to justify itself.

II.

We all meet people who consciously practise unselfishness. We dislike them. Altruism, abnegation, sacrifice, when exercised of deliberate purpose make us uncomfortable, and we shun such doormats, fawners, liars in the mud who lay themselves down to be trampled upon by their fellows, who scorn their self-betrayal. Unselfishness is too akin to humility, obedience, modesty and many other minor virtues, which in practice are major vices.

The only persons in whom unselfishness is pleasant and acceptable are those who have lived natural lives, remote from modernising influences, with no exteriorly dictated education and no contacts except their own circle in a placid rural community. With the spread of compulsory schooling, newspapers, radio, mechanism and urbanisation such are becoming so rare as to be a shock when met, albeit a pleasant surprise, with the hope they will never get imposed upon, deluded, or soiled by crude interference with sophistication.

The mass of boys and girls who leave school young and go to work retain few illusions after entering mine or mill, forge or factory, shop or office, wherever their labours lie, for each one has to keep up a self-defensive struggle against workmates, as well as resisting the encroachments of employers and their agents, such as managers and foremen and inspectors.

Courtship and marriage bring fresh trespasses upon personal liberty, already heavily invaded by the state and municipality as well as the demands of masters holding the whiphand owing to the necessity most men have of earning their living and supporting others, having little to sell but their limited labour power.

So selfishness becomes a sheer imperative for self-preservation, especially with advancing age. Growing children and the younger generations generally continuously arrogate to themselves liberties and privileges, so parents and elders have to fight to retain what small amounts of possessions and individuality they have won.

III.

If, as preachers and teachers and other vendors of moralistic pap assert, selfishness is a sin then selfish persons sin in good company. Examining those who achieve great things in this world, politicians, leaders, poets, painters, authors, orators, artists, musicians, actors, bishops, financiers, capitalists, all manner of successful figures, selfishness stands revealed as one of their chief constituents, an asset, an instrument of their advancement, a main component of character. Whether it be called expression, capacity for leadership, directive ability, talent, genius or aught else it is only selfishness in the highest degree, sharpened and polished and refined to be the tool of a prosperous career.

Nor are philanthropists, saints and martyrs exempt from this classification. Philanthropy is gratification of the ego at the expense of others, those benefited being really the victims of the uplifter's self-esteem.

Saintliness is only spiritual selfishness; the desire to be superior to the carnal and mundane crowd. For what other reason did the early saints live on tops of pillars, in deserts, up mountains, inhabit caves, and later segregate themselves into separate communities but that their self regard might have fullest play?

The act of martyrdom was purely selfish. So egocentric was the martyr, so concentrated on his own superior interpretation of truth that torture, suffering and death were but discomforts, incidental to his faith, but not enough to turn him from the path he trod of his own choosing.

In short, selfishness is one of the strongest motives of life, only approached as an inspiration by hate. Now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three, but greater than those is selfishness.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

CORRESPONDENCE

AN APPRECIATION

Sir,—I want to congratulate you sincerely on your article p. 357—8, 20th September. On p. 358 you made a wonderful point.

I also received issue 21st October by post, including my "Epitaph"—thank you. The printer altered Stanza 1 to include "And now for 'Victory,'" whereas it should have gone on to Stanza 2, at second half of line, in usual blank-verse style. It rather upset sense. Thank you for including it however.

With all good wishes,

Toowoomba, Old.

25th January, 1946.

REGINALD S. BOYS.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—11 a.m., Sunday, Archibald Robertson, M.A.: "Is Humanism Enough?"

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Bakers Hall, 122, Upper North Street, Belfast).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., J. T. Dorricot: "Men Without God."

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (Alexander Cafe, Victoria Street, Blackpool).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m., Mr. J. T. Brighton: "Civilised Savagery." 6-30 p.m., Mr. J. T. Brighton: "Jesus Christ—What think ye of Him?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. H. K. Jacobs (Manchester): "The Jew in the World To-day."

HOW NAPOLEON PLAYED WITH RELIGION

BY some historians it is claimed that Napoleon was a Christian and died in the Catholic faith.

In his biography, "Napoleon," Emil Ludwig thus refers to the great Corsican's last moments: "Beneath a layman's dress the priest carries something he seeks to hide. He demands to be left alone with the dying man. After a while he comes out, saying, 'I have given him extreme unction. Owing to the condition of the stomach no other sacrament was possible.'"

But, adds Ludwig, in his innermost soul Napoleon never accepted the teachings of any church—or Christianity. All religions were the same to him. He affected or adopted anything for the use he could make of it.

"During the Consulate," Ludwig proceeds, "he said in the Council of State: 'My policy is to rule in accordance with the will of the majority. This, I think, implies the recognition of the sovereignty of the people. I became a good Catholic when I wanted to finish the war in Vendee; in Egypt, I was a Turk; when I wished to win over the Italians, I was an ultramontane. If I reigned over the Jews, I should rebuild Solomon's temple. That is why I propose to talk about freedom in that part of San Domingo where slaves have been liberated, while maintaining slavery in the other part of the island.'"

Napoleon's contempt for popes is clearly shown in his dealings with Pius VI., Pius VII., and Gregory VII.

Ludwig relates that when Pius VII. was ordered—and obeyed the order—to come to Paris from Rome to anoint and crown him Emperor, Napoleon met the pope at the gate of the city, where "the Holy Father does not fail to note that Napoleon neither kneels to receive a blessing nor kisses hands in token of fealty. Paris is a town where people's faith is unstable, and where popes are held in little honour. The visitor is chilled."

In due course there is the crowning ceremony.

"When," says Ludwig, "the appointed instant has come, and all are expecting this man, who has never bowed the knee to anyone, to kneel before the Holy Father, Napoleon—to the amazement of the congregation—seizes the crown, turns his back on the pope and the altar, and, standing upright as always, crowns himself in the sight of France. Then he crowns his kneeling wife. None but the pope had known his intentions. Informed at the eleventh hour, Pius had lacked courage to threaten immediate departure."

It was a mere mockery by Napoleon of the legitimate formalities he was affecting to copy.

Among the many other papal episodes was the time when, excommunicated, Napoleon thus addressed a gathering of Catholic bishops in Holland: "Are you of the religion of Gregory VII.? I am not. My religion is that of Jesus Christ, who said, 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's.' Do you think I am the sort of man to kiss the pope's toe? Prove to me, imbeciles, that Jesus has appointed the pope his viceroy, and that the pope has power to excommunicate a monarch."

With the remark that Napoleon wanted to use religion that he might lull the masses to sleep, Ludwig quotes this utterance by "the new-made Consul" to the Council of State:—

"What I see in religion is, not the mystery of the incarnation, but social order. It associates with heaven an idea of equality, which prevents the poor from massacring the rich. Religion has the same sort of value as vaccination. It gratifies our taste for the miraculous. Society cannot exist without inequality of property; but this latter cannot exist without religion. One who is dying of hunger, when the man next him is feeding on dainties, can only be sustained by a belief in a higher power, and by the conviction that in another world there will be a different distribution of goods."

Ludwig shares the conviction with many others that Napoleon should be remembered for his Code Napoleon and his statesmanship generally rather than for his victories on the battlefield.

As proof of his vision—a vision the world has yet to realise—he quotes Napoleon as saying: "I wanted to pave the way for the unification of the great interests of Europe just as I had unified the parties in France. The transient mutterings of the peoples troubled me little—they would have been reconciled to me by the result. Europe would soon have become one nation, and any who travelled in it would always have been in a common fatherland. Sooner or later this union will be brought about by the force of events. The first impetus has been given; and, after the fall and the disappearance of my system, it seems to me that the only way in which an equilibrium can be achieved in Europe is through a league of nations."

And, even more explicitly, we get this: "I wanted to found a European system, a European code of laws, a European court of appeal. There would have been but one people throughout Europe."

Thus, in the Ludwig coverage of Napoleon's life, we have (a) very convincing exposition of Napoleon's non-religious views, and (b) a forecast of what the future Europe will have to be—it there is to be an end to the strife of the past.

Through Ludwig it is enlightening to find that Napoleon believed that no soldier was proof against cowardice, and that in every hard-fought battle there was a moment when even the bravest—in Napoleon's own words—"felt like turning tail."

Worth quoting, too, is Napoleon's comment, following the slaughter that confronted him after one of his battles: "If the kings of the world could contemplate such a sight as this they would hanker less after wars and conquests."

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

"BLUE LAWYERS" IN OUR TIME

FOR some time past many newspapers have given publicity to a body of religious lunatics who call themselves the Lord's Day Observance Society. Recently they have been concentrating their poisonous attentions on Sunday Cinema shows. But they do not, as might be thought, wish to close the Cinema to everybody on a Sunday; their idea is to close them to all under-sixteens. Their game is too obvious to need explanation. If they close the Cinemas as they have tried to, young people are going to be forced into Sunday Schools for lack of something better to do. A very pleasing advertisement for the Church, is it not?

I seem to recollect Mr. Winston Churchill having said that we were fighting for freedom in the name of God, or using words to that effect. Here we have a collection of religious maniacs encroaching on the liberties of the rising generation in the name of the Lord! Particularly interesting when there is such a conflict of views inside our national Church, don't you think? When will we get these people to see that the mass of publicists they have received is injuring their own cause? Do they have to have a mere Freethinker to remind them that their Master once said (or so they tell us): "The Sabbath was made for man: not man for the Sabbath." It is hard to find anything more difficult than teaching a Christian to see reason, even when it is for his own good.

These pernicious hypocrites belong to the era of Hampden and Cromwell, they are three hundred years out of date. They are preaching to deaf ears in an age when the pillory is never seen and the stocks are a museum piece. It is time these crack-brained fanatics remembered that Puritan England is dead and that "Blue Laws" were first published in 1673.

FRANCIS I. GOULD.