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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

"The War For Christian Civilisation"

WE make no apology for, once again, returning in these columns to the question of war. For, whatever the future may hold in store, it can hardly be disputed that a war-atmosphere is, yet again, for the third time within the present century, stealing over these islands like a creeping mist, enveloping reason, sanity, and social reform alike, in its nefarious path in a kind of creeping paralysis.

The immediate causes of war, which embrace politics, economics, and ideology in their field, lie a little outside the scope of this journal. But all Freethinkers, whatever their personal political persuasion, will, we think, concur that the *ultimate* cause of war, beyond any of its immediate causes, lies in the breakdown of human reason, in its recurring failures to keep pace with the ever-changing process of evolution. It is a melancholy but undeniable fact that the same physical brain, substantially unaltered in its atomic structure from the days of the ape-man in prehistoric times, is still in charge of human destiny. Can we wonder, after all, that the self-same brain which manipulated the primitive boomerang of aboriginal man, to-day fails so disastrously when faced with the overwhelming complexity of the atomic age? Our physical tools for creating a visible social order have so far been apparently unequal to the evolutionary possibilities of the situation.

Ultimately, the problem of war, like all other major human problems which urgently demand a solution if mankind is to survive and to prosper, is a question of the power and extent of human reason. To the Rationalist, reason is all-embracing in its claims, it includes politics and economics no less than ethics and religion, whilst the genuine Secularist, like the ancient Stoic, includes within his mental and moral orbit surely, the whole range of secular interests?

The social atmosphere engendered by modern "total" war cuts right across all such progressives' mental attitudes: hysteria becomes the norm of human behaviour. (And if this was the case of even wars fought with bows and arrows, how much more may we not expect such a fear-haunted atmosphere to spread in the era of "scientific" slaughter which we see to-day?)

War is, accordingly, the negation of reason and of all those constructive qualities upon which a secular society depends for its existence. To-day, moreover, there is an additional and very cogent reason why Rationalists of all shades—we will not add of all denominations!—should unite to combat the mounting war-hysteria which is gaining ground so notably at the present juncture. That reason is, briefly, this: should a Third World War eventuate, it will be a gift-horse to the Christian Churches, since, whatever its real causes may be, it will undoubtedly be represented as being "a war for Christian civilisation," and the voice of the clergy proclaiming a new "crusade" against "Atheistic Bolshevism" will undoubtedly drown all other sounds, at least until finally silenced by the still louder roar of falling bombs.

Already the Christian Churches are, as it were, indulging in trial practice for their future crusading role. The Roman Catholic Church, via the medium of its world-wide Press and pulpit, is already busily engaged in indoctrinating its adherents with the appropriate "Holy War" ideology. It appears to us to be highly probable that the about-to-be proclaimed dogma of the Assumption is, first and foremost, a rallying-cry for the (atomic) "Holy War." In this connection we may recall that the Holy Mother of God is already no stranger to Russia, for at Fatima she had already predicted the "conversion" of that present Satanic land! Nor are the other Churches behindhand. Canterbury and York lose no opportunity to denounce the "Atheistic Materialism" of the Kremlin, even if their shrill treble hardly equals the thunderous denunciations of the Vatican.

Even the all-Protestant Methodist Church, from which we learned recently (with some astonishment!) that British Socialism derived its ultimate principles, recently repudiated its pacifist minister, Dr. Donald Soper, and declared that it opted for war—and what a war!—as against the victory of "Atheistic Communism."

Accordingly, we may assume that the clerical chorus is ready to start baying full-cry the moment that the democratic crusaders give the appropriate signal.

Upon the side of the prospective "crusaders" themselves we can be reasonably certain that "full employment" can and will be found for their clerical mouthpieces as and when the "war for Christian civilisation" eventually does get going. For a Third World War would not be popular, if only for the simple but sufficient reason that it comes too soon after the last instalment; the public memory is short, but hardly as short as that! Moreover, appropriate slogans to stir the disillusioned masses are in short supply; "democracy" has become a trifle thread-bare, and, anyway, it has already been used twice in a single life-time. Whilst "Liberty" does not sound altogether convincing, if the Russian enemy is totalitarian, American democracy has not always shown too scrupulous a respect for Freedom where, say, its Negro citizens have been concerned.

Accordingly, Christianity is likely to remain the trump-card. In a "Crusade for Christian Civilisation," if the victims of the bombs have got nothing on earth to fight for, think of the reward that will await the fallen "crusader" in Heaven! Decidedly, the defence of Christianity is going to play a big part in the next war. "When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be"—where?

A final irony in an ironic situation! It is often forgotten that the U.S.A., like its great rival the U.S.S.R., is, officially at least, a Secularist State; the "Constitution of the United States," the highest American juridical authority, regards religion as a private matter for the individual citizen entirely outside its jurisdiction.*

* Constitution of the United States: "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Cf. also, President George Washington—Treaty with Tripoli, 1797—"The Government of the United States is not in any sense, founded upon the Christian religion."

From which arises the surely intriguing situation that the last hope of the Christian religion in its current struggle with "Atheistic Materialism" lies in the victory of Science via the Atomic Bomb and of a Secularist State, the U.S.A., which ignores the Supernatural.

"How are the mighty fallen" since the days of the medieval Crusades!

F. A. RIDLEY.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

"THE FORTNIGHTLY" for August 1950 contains an essay by Professor A. Einstein on Science and Religion. Properly understood as a whole the essay will be useful to Freethought. It will also give a degree of satisfaction to the intelligent "nothingarian" in religion, with no religion of his own, unequipped for any knowledgeable discussion on the subject, but with a mysterious feeling that it is necessary—if only to keep the other fellow decent. On the other hand the essay will come to the genuine Christian believer as, what would be described in boxing terms as, a beautiful punch on the jaw.

Freethinkers, with good cause, are suspicious when famous men of science are admitted to the popular press on the subject of science and religion. It would seem to be a hard and fast press rule that under that title a boost for religion is an essential condition. At any rate it is a very pronounced feature in the essay by Professor Einstein, but in this case the value of that feature can be placed at zero, as we shall see later.

Professor Einstein agrees that science and religion operate in separate spheres, his actual words being, "even though the realms of religion and science are clearly marked off from each other, nevertheless there exist between the two strong reciprocal relationships and dependencies." There is no dispute over the separate realms of religion and science, but the second part of the statement is only true in the sense that all human thoughts and actions, whether fair or foul, are related to the physical and mental life of humanity. But we do not leave those thoughts and actions in an entangled mass and say they have a reciprocal relationship. To understand things better we sort out and organise into categories, so that we do not go to astronomy to learn how to cook a meal, neither do we go to science for religion, or to religion for science. One need only see the equipment of a science laboratory and that of a church to realise they operate in separate spheres.

That seems perfectly clear, in fact too clear for any marriage between science and religion, so the clarity must be undone and a "reciprocal relationship" arranged. By putting a limit on science and ignoring all the traditional factors in the make up of religions, and substituting the better side of human nature and aspirations as religion the "reciprocal relationship" is arranged. Professor Einstein says, "One can have the clearest and most complete knowledge of what is, and yet not be able to deduct from that what should be the goal of our human aspirations. Objective knowledge provides us with powerful instruments for the achievements of certain ends, but the ultimate goal itself and the longing to reach it must come from another source." The inference there seems to be that science can win knowledge and is then at a dead end, and that religion then takes charge and inspires men to yearn for, and seek the good lying dormant in the raw material. That inference is strengthened when Professor Einstein later remarks, "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

The science described by Professor Einstein for the purpose of linking it with religion is an emasculated science, not the science that we know and experience, not the science that Professor Einstein has helped to establish by his own scientific labour and which has made him famous throughout the world.

And the religion offered for "reciprocal relationship" with the castrated version of science is surely one of the most unique forms of religion ever conceived. It has no God, no saviour, no B.V.M., no spirits, clean or unclean, no devils, no miracles, no resurrection, no cross, and in consequence bang goes the necessity for prayers, hymns, sermons, creeds and thanksgivings; all the old baggage to be dumped, what a cheerful outlook for the clergy and the genuine Christian believers. It looks as though ex-Christians would be expected to be decent citizens without any help from heaven, just like ordinary Freethinkers.

Professor Einstein's essay makes no attempt at any stage to deal with Christianity as contained in the Bible and the teachings of science. The fact remains that if Genesis contains the true story of the creation of our earth and universe, then science is wrong in its story, in fact there is then no need for the version put forward by science. If science is right then the Bible is wrong, both versions may be wrong but both cannot be right.

Professor Einstein's essay will be a very useful weapon in Freethought discussions. The only way he can bring science and religion into "reciprocal relationship" is to split science into two parts and call one of the parts science and the other part religion, and it is because of that splitting that the part he calls religion is devoid of the fundamental material that enters into the common structure of religions.

R. H. ROSETTI.

THE FOUR PILLARS OF WISDOM

IT is now many years since Herbert Spencer reminded us that "though knowledge increases, wisdom lags behind." Since that time knowledge has been increasing by leaps and bounds, but the collective wisdom, even if it has not lagged still further behind, has certainly shown no corresponding signs of advance. There can be little doubt that the main responsibility for this state of affairs lies at the doors of an educational system which lays far too much emphasis on the mere acquisition of knowledge, and far too little on the basic principles to which that knowledge is to be applied. As Sheldon Dudley, in *The Four Pillars of Wisdom* (Watts xvii + 246 pp.; 8s. 6d. net) says:—

"The chief reason why great men are not always wise, and why most wise men are elderly, is because no one in our type of culture teaches the infants, the children, the adolescents, or the young men in our society, the elements of those fundamental sciences on which all further knowledge should be built and by which wisdom and a critical outlook can be so much more rapidly acquired."

The fundamental sciences to which Sheldon Dudley refers are placed by him in four arbitrary divisions—semantics, psychology, statistics, and logic—constituting the four pillars of wisdom which give the title to his book. It is pleasing to note that in his conclusion the author states that if many still find that the symbols: psychology, statistics, logic and semantics, are objectionable, they can, without straining the basic principles of semasiology too severely, substitute human nature, a sense of proportion, common sense, and perspicuity.

respectively, as synonyms for the Four Pillars of Wisdom. This is all the more commendable as the substituted terms give us a clearer idea of the ground to be traversed than do the original symbols, and enable us all the more readily to agree with the author's remark that some elementary knowledge of the functions of these four sciences, and of their effect in leavening the bread of knowledge, is indispensable to all men who aspire to be wise.

"Words are wise men's counters; they are the money of fools." So said Thomas Hobbes, and the remark is as true to-day as when it was first uttered by him over 300 years ago. Most people still fail to comprehend that words are merely symbols. This fact, and the further fact that these symbols often mean different things to different people, are lucidly dealt with in the chapter dealing with "Semantics: The Science of Symbols and Meaning." With the aid of many interesting examples we are shown how the use of words may be abused: how they change or extend their meanings as the years slip by; how the differences in the North American and English meanings of many common words has probably been brought about by geographical isolation; how certain words call forth adverse or favourable emotional reactions, and how the same word may produce opposite reactions according to the context in which it is placed, or the circumstances in which it is uttered. Many other aspects of the use and abuse of words are dealt with in this most interesting and informative chapter, wherein the author has done much to disturb that "contented ignorance" of the nature of language as exhibited by the complacency and self-confidence of so many people in their ability to understand everybody's meaning, written or spoken, which it is one of the chief aims of his thesis to upset.

When we come to the chapter dealing with psychology we find we are upon much less certain ground, and that we are dealing with a subject—it can scarcely be dignified by the name of science—the very principles of which have not yet been formulated. The author admits that psychology is still a very confused and controversial subject divided into a multitude of *schools*, and that the exponents of one psychology are just about as tolerant of other psychologists as are the priests of different religions. He also says that: "specialists are intolerant of criticism by non-specialists, and I think, from my considerable experience of psychological committees and conferences, psychologists, medical or non-medical, are worse than the average in this respect." He also refers to the childish squabbling and undignified bickering exhibited by so many professional psychologists. In view of all this, psychology would appear to be more of a reed than a pillar, and less calculated to make one wise than otherwise. This the author himself confirms in his sound discussion and criticism of the many conflicting systems of psychology that are in vogue to-day, from which he is led to conclude that everyone must to a great extent make his own psychology.

The next two chapters, one dealing with "Psychology and Religion," and the other with "Statistics," will well repay the reading and it is regretted that space does not permit them to be discussed in detail in this review.

Finally we come to the chapter on "Logic," the subject which, in many respects, may well be regarded as the most important of them all. Considering that, as Jevons says, "logic treats of those principles and forms of thought which must be employed in every branch of knowledge," one is at a loss to understand why, after taking the highest priority in education up to the middle of the last century, it should since have fallen into such

disrepute. Sheldon Dudley pertinently remarks that this "neglect of logic is perhaps the most curious, tragic, and glaring anomaly in our modern system of education," and that its disappearance is a "retrograde step in British culture." Confirmation of this is not far to seek.

In this soundly reasoned and thought-provoking work it is certainly not the author's fault if he has failed in his purpose of drawing attention to the dangerous defects in our culture; and the work itself is a refreshing example of the clear, precise thinking which he seeks to encourage others to cultivate.

FRANK KENYON.

PEACE AND WAR

I HAVE often argued with my old friend, F. A. Ridley, both in private and in print, now I am at it again. In a leading article in *The Freethinker* recently he said that we should give serious consideration to the problem of War, which should give precedence over "anti-religious polemic." Dealing with the relation of Freethought and War he pointed out the absurdity of Bertrand Russell's alternative of atomic war or Communism, but makes it a moral question in the idealistic antithesis of the nightmare of "the collapse of civilisation" and the dream of "world government." But I suggest that a deeper consideration of the relation of Peace and War will lead to concern with religious polemic.

Indeed, I think I might say that he, himself, follows the pattern of Christian polemic closely, even to the extent of forecasting a time of tribulation and the end of the world; for he speaks of "unimaginable horrors" and even of "the physical disintegration of the globe itself." But what becomes of reason in face of such nonsensical exaggeration? He has often asserted the identity of opposites and so, in concern with "the Church of Rome and the Church of Moscow" he can get no further than "a plague on both your houses." In his totalitarian antithesis it is a choice of two evils, like the Christian dilemma—God or the Devil—choose. But in his dialectical contrast he fails to see the absurdity of opposites in rhetorical exaggeration.

H. G. Wells ended his *War in the Air* with a vision of the survivors rebuilding civilisation, which is reminiscent of childhoods fairy-tale ending—they lived happy ever after. But this play upon wars and rumours of wars is typically Biblical. The contrast of civilisation with barbarism goes back to the Ancient Greek use of that word, and civilisation, as the grandeur of Rome, an epitome of all that is beneficial, like the idea of humanity as the symbol of all the virtues, gives the pattern of the Christian claim that his religion is all that is desirable, in the idea that God is good. But in the dialectic antithesis of sheep and goats, saints and sinners, this only creates the problem of evil. Playing the Christian game in rhetorical exaggeration does not face up to the problem.

Ridley is right in saying that our primitive ancestors, like the Eskimos, had little to fight about or with. War is inseparable from the history of civilisation, with the development, not only of lethal weapons but also of an elaborate technique. The evolution from bows and arrows to A and H bombs is as much an aspect of civilisation as man's inhumanity to man is characteristic of humanity. There is another aspect of this in the development in the technique of the cold war, in the effective use of propaganda and the affective cultivation of blood-lust. With religion this reaches the peak in ferocious fanaticism, and as Ridley said, the ideological aspect of religious wars, such as the Thirty Years War, needs consideration.

It also involves a technique in the moralising of, and justification of war.

The fantastic absurdity of moral theory is shown by the facts, and Ridley's considerations are sufficient to show the absurdity of the moral questions raised. War has been condemned, war has been justified. To put the question if there can be a just war or to make it a question of moral justice is to raise it out of the realm of fact into that of the Eternal Verities, the realm of pure abstraction. To say that there is a common basis of agreement in moral matters is to ignore the fact that it is the disagreement that constitutes the problem, just as majority rule does not touch the minority problem. We come down to force or personal feeling in the so-called spiritual values; the aesthetic and the affective; so that moral theory is personal justification.

But this dream and this nightmare are relative to life and death. Much is made of death but statistics show that the death roll in peace is little different from that in war; more people died in the influenza epidemic after the 1914 war than were killed in that war. And if death is only natural, fear of death is insufficient incentive; it becomes—Death where is thy sting? and the Christian went much further than Ridley with "unimaginable horrors" both here and hereafter. But it is not a matter of a choice, of Heaven or Hell, of the extravagant idiosyncracies of insanity; or any other absurdity of opposites; but of their relationship. Death has no meaning without life, or life without death; and peace has no meaning during peace; in peace we prepare for war and in war we crave for peace. It is the nightmare and the dream.

With a dialectic approach Arthur Koestler tried to consider this psychology on the analogy of the spectrum, but the analogy is fallacious. The intermediate colours, as blue, green, yellow or orange, can not be explained as combinations of violet and red. The various colours are different and relative. In the same way this psychology can not be dealt with in black and white. The fallacy of this dialectic of the absurdity of opposites is that it goes to extremes in exaggerated contrast, either towards the bandying of meaningless words or to the other extreme, to ridiculously fantastic analogy or allegory; at one end, perplexity in mystical quiescence and at the other, violent action in sheer exasperation. But commonsense is not a combination of exaggerated idiosyncracies.

I remember Chapman Cohen arguing that civilians make war, soldiers only do the fighting; a proposition that does relate peace and war. The assertion that peace is indivisible is as much a totalitarian exaggeration as the idea of total war. War arises in accentuation of the conflicts of peace. If the problem of war is to be solved it needs serious consideration of the problems of peace. Indeed, the ideas of peace and war are extremes of normal conflicts. So far as Freethought is concerned, there is need for that in both peace and war. As to whether any one problem should take precedence, I might suggest that the essence of Freethought is thinking and its relation to action. The real question is whether intellectual conflict is preferable to emotional and physical conflict.

H. H. PREECE.

If the writers of anonymous letters are held in contempt, what shall we think of the writers of anonymous gospels? And if the contents of anonymous letters should be rejected as unworthy of confidence, how shall the contents of anonymous gospels be received? The four gospels of the New Testament are the work of anonymous authors.

L.K.W.

THE POPE'S LATEST SWINDLE

So Mary, The Virgin, has apparently accomplished another miracle of which we have only just heard although it was really performed 2,000 years ago. Her first effort established a record—she produced a child by supernatural means. Now, at the end of 2,000 years, his nibs, the Pope, has informed us that Mary was wafted to Heaven in her bodily state, thereby equalling the record of Elisha who made the journey in a fiery chariot. Jesus Christ who also put up a long distance flight, was another successful competitor. Now His Holiness has received private information that the Virgin's performance must be entered in the record books. For the sake of the faithful, it is to be hoped that nobody else will make the trip, for if so, the whole business will become as common as the channel-swimming craze. However, there is no doubt of the genuineness of this latest claim. The Pope has said it and Christ's Vicar on Earth has the direct ear of God. Protestants and other sects seem to be wildly excited about this latest stunt—why? After all, it is a matter that concerns Catholics only. If the Pope declared that instead of three Gods being one, it had been discovered that five was the correct number, this would be accepted by the devout without question... "Their's not to reason why"... And this balloney will be received as 100 per cent. true by the dupes who not only swallow the wafer at Communion, but swallow any rubbish they are told with just as much ease as they swallow the real body of Christ—God-eating being a regular part of the programme—dished out to the mutts by this primitive and dangerous bunch of reactionaries who have a finger in every political pie, and want the world to believe that they alone are capable of settling the world's unrest. What makes one so tired is to read the opinions of some of our leading newspapers. We are told that those of us who disagree with the Pope's latest fooling ought to approach the subject with calmness and realise that this pronouncement means so much to the many millions of devout Catholics. Yet these same papers would object and laugh at any organisation which claimed that Hans Anderson's Fairy Tales were divinely inspired.

The Roman Catholic Church is always ready to boast of the high standard of culture possessed by so many of her followers. They claim writers of note, university professors and even a few usually very second-rate scientists. How can these men possibly stifle their reason? We read in the Old Testament how Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, but these people seem to be able to command their brains to remain dormant. And why all this fuss because the Virgin Mary was brought direct to Heaven? Surely there must have been some other virgins there before Mary arrived, she could not have been the only gooseberry on the bush: and yet we are told that in attacking religion, Freethinkers are attacking a dead horse. If we did not attack and attack all the time, the world would drift back to the dark ages. The weapons of the Church to-day are the same as they have always been—lies, fraud, humbug and tyranny over the minds of men.

Father Bernard Leeming, a Jesuit theologian, at Heythrop Roman Catholic College, explained the Roman Catholic dogma of the bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary to a representative of the *News Chronicle* (August 22nd, 1950). He described it as an answer to communism and said that spiritual thoughts can pervade the material even through death. "Christ and Mary," said the reverend one, "Guarantee full bodily salvation." Here, in his own words is how the reverend one explains

this latest dogma. "The Assumption, anyhow is a nice idea. One human woman at least has not had her bodily beauty destroyed by death; eaten by worms or burned up by fire. God loved His mother so much that He wanted her with Him *body* and soul. If one man, Jesus Christ, lives after death, why then, so may the rest of us; and the fact that it is a woman who is able to get there sooner than the rest of us—why, to object seems to me just mean. Better deny the whole bag of tricks; God's power over the laws of nature; the Virgin birth; the Motherhood of God; the Christian faith in the Resurrection."

Father Bernard Leeming says—"better deny the whole bag of tricks"—for once a cleric has spoken the truth: it is a swindle and a bag of tricks from beginning to end.

The Pope is certainly a busy man. Last week he told the world of Mary's flight through space. This week he demolished evolution. In his latest 5,000-word encyclical stating what Roman Catholics may or may not believe about the origin of the human race, he cited the theory of evolution as one example of a modern theory which is exploited to undermine faith in the divine origin of man. About Adam and the rib story of Eve, the Pope said that the chapters in the Bible detailing this event are true and contain, in his own words "The principal truths which are fundamental for our salvation and also give a popular description of the human race."

All this might be summed up in a rhyme of our childhood:—

Adam was the first man, Cain was another.

Cain went and slew Abel his brother.

There was mother Eve who couldn't sleep without a pillar,

And the greatest man who ever lived was Jack the Giant-Killer.

This badly-constructed nursery rhyme contains as much sense as the latest pronouncements of the Vatican.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

WALLED-IN NUNS

M. BETHAM EDWARDS was a social worker of the "National Reformer" type. She heard and read much of "Immured Nuns" which she did not believe, and the only walled-in nuns by Roman Catholics, were those women within convent walls, as Mrs. Edwards relates her personal investigations, according to the following interesting revelation. "I provided myself with a letter from Cardinal Manning to the Bishop of Nantes in order to see as much as possible of convent life in Brittany, where I soon discovered that a bishop had no authority over reverend mothers and holy abbesses. In order to gain entrance into a convent, I had to rely on the influence of outsiders. This was an advantage because I felt unfettered in my written criticism of convent systems. It is a curious fact that devout romanists often express themselves severely, quite as much as a rigid protestant against the cloister and the confessional. "Imagine my feelings," said a roman catholic friend, when I called yesterday, whom I found busy preparing a wedding gown of orthodox style, with train and orange blossoms. Then, Juliette is to be married? Madame B. shook her head; no, she has decided to take the veil and become a Carmelite nun. This wedding gown to be thrown aside and my poor girl will be dead to our family and the world! If she lose a parent, or family relative, none dare ask the name of the deceased, or speak of them. In

this fearful Order, the nuns wear no linen, only woollen garments; they never sleep in beds, reclining upon bare boards, and offences are punished by severities that often drive the women mad! These 'burials alive—prises d'habit' are usually in Catholic papers, and seeing one of these announcements, I went to the Chapel of the Visitation where a nun whispered to me, 'would you like to see her?' I readily followed my guide to a room within the Convent where other visitors gathered in front of an iron grating fixed into the wall. A curtain behind the grating was drawn aside and we saw a girl in a white satin dress with bridal veil and myrtle wreath and by her side stood an aged nun; the pair forming a suggestive contrast.

This leave-taking scene was painful, as she put her white-gloved hand between the iron bars. The victim for the last time bade farewell to relatives and friends, and the whole circumstance a horrible mockery. Her elderly parents were weeping, and we passed in the chapel for the "sacred service." I have never ventured among savages, but this ceremony of burying alive cannot be more repugnant to civilisation than the religious rite I witnessed, and will describe in writing.

Divided from the Chapel by an iron screen was a smaller one in which the cloistered women sit for Sunday services. Here the ceremony was to take place. The priests were at the High Altar, brilliantly lit, while the Novice and other nuns remained behind the screen. Presently the "*Glas*," or death-bell, tolled. The parents with relations take their seats.

Black-robed nuns move around with lighted candles, chanting a part of the ritual, while the "Bride" walks towards an opening in the screen, and there kneels; her head and shoulders only are visible. A priest stands in front of the opening and delivers an oration, which for unctuous flattery and gross superstition would be hard to equal. "For you, my dear Sister," he said, I have no fear that you are a veritable angel of purity, one of the chosen to be cut off from worldly corruption. You are about to take upon yourself, dear Sister, the vows of perpetual chastity." The sacrament was administered and the vows taken. Again the death-bell tolled, and during an interval the victim's hair is cut short and her bridal dress changed for a black robe and a veil, symbols of life-long imprisonment.

Then followed a gruesome ceremony. A bier covered with a funeral pall, upon which she lay, while the service for the dead was chanted, while the nuns walked around with their lighted tapers. Onlookers sobbed, as they gazed at this morbid scene.

A priest approached the screen and, inclining his head towards the apparently lifeless body on the bier, said with a loud voice: "Rise, my dear Sister." The nuns formed a procession and retired with their victim, behind the screen, and the singing stopped.

"Oh chastity," quoth I, parodying one of the world-known epigrams. "Oh chastity, what crimes are committed in thy name!"

It will be remembered that quite recently, as announced in the newspapers, that questions were put in the House of Commons to obtain the power to make official inspections of all convents and similar institutions in England.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

It takes more than one person to save the world. Jesus could not save a Mohammedan, and Mohammed could not save a Christian. Everyone who helps a fellow-being helps to save mankind.

L.K.W.

ACID DROPS

In the opinion of the Rev. F. Martin of the *Sunday Graphic*, "much of the religion that is offered to us is a kindergarten version of Christianity." We heartily agree, though with the proviso that we think that any kind of Christianity is still in the infantile stage. All "our Lord" wanted was people to come to him like little children—for any *thinking* adult could not help but reject the fantastic nonsense which he taught about miracles, angels, devils, Hell, and Heaven.

All the same, Mr. Martin heartily dislikes the word "Agnostic," which he tells us was coined "by Victorian scientists" and which only means "ignorance." If by this Mr. Martin means that he knows more about God and God's ways than an Agnostic then we can only say that "ignorance" is a good word to describe his own belief. Any Agnostic will tell him about God Almighty as fully and as truthfully as any parson, archbishop, or even pope.

We note that the Very Rev. W. R. Matthews has replied to the recent article in the *Sunday Pictorial* by the Rev. Austin Lee—"So—I Quit." Mr. Lee, it will be remembered, gave his bishops a terrible slating. The Dean of St. Paul's rather shamefacedly admits that the parson has a case, for the Church is not yet exactly "the Family of God," and the sense of "frustration" complained about by Mr. Lee is shared by almost all young priests. But Dr. Matthews feels "it would be deplorable" if young men seeking ordination accepted "Mr. Lee's account at its face value." It would certainly be deplorable if they did not.

The "Church Times" devotes nearly two columns in a desperate attempt to champion the Virgin Birth—and actually claims that it was accepted by Bishop Gore. Well, in the *New Commentary*, Gore admits that "the Virgin Birth was certainly not part of the original Apostolic message." If that is the case, then the Gospels cannot be cited as "authorities" though the *Church Times* does so in fact. How poverty stricken are its arguments any one can see when it claims that the Scriptures bear witness both to the "Incarnation" and the "Virgin Birth." The Scriptures bear witness also to the Devil carrying Jesus through the air, but we doubt that even the *Church Times* can swallow that silly nonsense.

Mr. Lar Daly, leader of the "Christian Action Party" of U.S.A., has asked President Truman for permission to drop an atomic or hydrogen bomb on the Kremlin. Had Mr. Daly's party been named the "Atheist Action Party," we can imagine what a howl of horror would have arisen. Without a doubt there is something in a name, and the "Christian Party" will get plenty of support. We are not the least surprised at this truly Christian idea; after all, the first atom bomb was dropped by a Christian nation.

During the month of August, the "English Martyrs" were bombarded with petitions, prayers, and Novenas, to "intercede for a miraculous cure of two men given up by doctors." The miracles are necessary, reports *Universe*, before the martyrs can be canonised. Evidently, sainthood is not easily attained, and some sort of a "points system" operates: so many miracles must be performed for a Beata, and so many for Canonisation.

In any case, Father Tigar, S. J., says that if Catholics want their martyrs to be canonised, they have got to see that the martyrs do something about it. We can imagine pious Catholics asking, say, the Jesuit Robert Southwell for a couple of miracles, or no sainthood.

Following a request from Buddhist monks for a Catholic Community to offer prayers in atom-bombed towns in Japan, a French nun is on her way to Hiroshima to devote her life to perpetual prayer. Fr. Lassalle S.J., to whom the request was made, asked the Buddhist monks why they particularly wanted Catholic nuns, and was told that "the prayers of Catholics go straight to heaven." This certainly looks as if the Buddhist Prayer Wheel has rusted. However, it is a good story and readers of the *Universe* will see in this report another instance of the superiority of Catholicism over "paganism." The Buddhist's request (if true) will amuse Freethinkers who are often told that Buddhism is a philosophy particularly suitable for Freethinkers.

It looks as if Dr. C. Wright, who recently told a Conference of Modernists that "few Christian scholars believe the Virgin Birth to be an historical fact," is being quietly sacked. In any case, his appointment as a tutor is to end. The Archbishop of Canterbury waxed very indignant with Dr. Wright, and asserts that the Virgin Birth is a fact of history. Had the Archbishop qualified his statement by saying that the Virgin Birth is a *Christian* fact of history, even we would have agreed with him, for there is truth, and there is *Christian* truth.

The case of the burial of Mr. and Mrs. Mason in the same grave, over which two separate services were held (a Church of England and a Roman Catholic), could have been made the basis of an interesting experiment. Were the services heard simultaneously by God? Did he understand the Latin and the English languages? Could the prayers possibly get mixed up? And which service had the most influence with Him? Perhaps the Spiritualists can help us.

A few years ago, in a blaze of publicity, it was decided that the various religious denominations would work in closer harmony and unity. Pulpits were to be exchanged, the "ministry of the Word and the Sacraments" were to be shared, and the much vaunted brotherly love which up to date had been but a dream, was to become a reality. Alas, according to the Rev. E. Dewich, intercommunion concessions are so niggardly, co-operation between the denominations is almost absent, and the exchange of pulpits so few that Christian unity is still a dream. All of which does not surprise us, Christians seemingly prefer to hang separately rather than together.

All who are interested in "brawling" in church—a delightful game by true blue Christians in opposition to "Romish" practices—ought to know that it is forbidden by an Act dated 1551-1552. The point to note is that for such an Act to be passed, there must have been plenty of brawling then, proof enough that even in the pious Ages of Faith, all was not too well with Christian unity. This Act was "An Acte agaynst fighting and quarelinge in Churches and Churchyardes" and an interesting article on the subject appears in the *Church Times* for August 25th. Of course, no Act will prevent brawling sometime and somewhere where Christians are concerned. They so love one another.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. EAKIN.—You have every right to quote the Old Testament in any discussion with a Christian. It is as much God's word as the New Testament.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FRIEDENKER (Switzerland), DON BASILIO (Italy).

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.

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance. Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

The 21st Birthday Celebration of Conway Hall will take place on Sunday, September 24, and members of the N.S.S. are cordially invited.

The guests of honour will be Mr. and Mrs. Hutton Hynd (now returned from leadership of the St. Louis Ethical Society) and the morning address will be delivered by Mr. Hynd. At 3 o'clock we shall meet in the Large Hall. There will be a programme of speeches in which Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe, Mr. S. G. Green, Mr. G. E. O'Dell, Mr. Joseph McCabe, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith and Mrs. D. M. Clements have been invited to take part. A musical entertainment is also being arranged and there will be tea in the Library at 4-45. It is hoped to make this a happy occasion, and the opportunity for many friends of this Society to meet and to show their appreciation of the work at Conway Hall during the past 21 years of its existence.

The Friendship Liberal League, Inc., of Philadelphia, has issued a most attractive seal like a postage stamp with a portrait of Thomas Paine engraved upon it. For many years, efforts have been made to induce the U.S. postal authorities to issue a stamp bearing Paine's portrait without success. Stamps have been issued bearing portraits of his contemporaries—Washington, Jefferson, and others—but, in spite of his tremendous services to the cause of Revolution, similar honour has been refused Thomas Paine. We know the reason of course—his forthright attack on revealed religion. Still, we must not complain. Paine's reputation has never been higher than now. We hope the Paine seal will have every success.

From Labour, (Washington, D.C.): On July 4 last, at Morristown, New Jersey, an "heroic statue" of Thomas Paine was unveiled. It is a 14-foot figure of the "firebrand" of the American Revolution, with a musket across his knee, writing one of his "Crisis" papers on a drum-head.

A lot of people have criticised Paine in his time and since, but he told George Washington's soldiers, in flaming and immortal words, what they were fighting for. Who can say that, if they had not been inspired by Paine, they would have stuck through Valley Forge and seven years of war, and won our free America? So let's not forget "Tom" Paine!

"CHANGING BELIEFS"

MR. JOHN ROWLAND'S reference to my preferring "an eye for an eye" to "give the other cheek" gave him the opportunity he has perhaps waited for—the opportunity to say clearly what has been evident to anyone who has read his very sympathetic but hopelessly uncritical reviews in this journal of Christian apologetic works. Like Mr. J. W. Poynter, he has discovered that there is something in religion which the "arid and bleak materialism" which some of us profess does not give him.

His recent letter in these columns does not hint, however, the extent of his conversion, but I am sure he will not mind my saying that in his article in the Unitarian Inquirer for August 5, he makes it quite clear that he has found God, and that he now has "a definite leaning towards some religious explanation of the mysteries of the Universe."

Now, I am all for Freethought, and I have no right to demur at any one-time Rationalist seeing the Light in a way different from what this journal has taught since G. W. Foote gave us its first number in 1881. If Mr. Rowland's reason and reasoning take him to God, that is his own affair. Those of us who used to read the way Mr. J. W. Poynter went in and out of the Church of Rome had a delightful object-lesson of completely muddled thinking; and I can hardly believe that Mr. Rowland will stop at such a half-way house as Theism, pure and simple. If God exists, he must have a Church to give forth his commands, and a Revelation to be interpreted only by his specially appointed servants. The certainty which the Church of Rome has always insisted on things Divine must make it the last solemn refuge of all waverers, and no doubt we shall hear one day that Mr. Rowland has taken the only logical plunge. By reposing in the bosom of the Church, all doubts and hesitations disappear. The ship, plunging heavily in uncharted seas, rides at last over the Unitarian waves, and settles safely in the calm and lovely harbour of Rome.

Mr. Rowland tells us that he is dissatisfied because he has come to see "the fundamental split in our world"—not exactly that between America and Russia—which may result "in the crash of everything that we find worth while." I also recognise this split, but I do not see the necessity of turning to religion to get over it. The struggle between the haves and the have-nots is one which seems to have been pretty evident throughout the ages. People will also fight for power and ideologies, and I have never seen that in history any appeal to God Almighty, or any prayers to him, have brought any result whatever. I am afraid that I must add here also that even universal education does not seem to have had the effect its supporters thought it would have.

The vast majority of people all over the world cannot think. I am sorry to put it brutally, but it should be said. People are swayed by mob oratory, or appeals to cupidity, or by perfectly unintelligible articles in books and journals. Fifty years ago, I thought that a reading of the *Age of Reason* or *God and My Neighbour* was all that was necessary to make men give up the Bible. The

very small number of convinced Freethinkers in England proves how hopelessly wrong I was. The Bible is still the great Court of Appeal to most people, and to our reverent Rationalists it is sometimes even more so than to an ordinary Christian.

Mr. Rowland rather sadly confesses that many religious dogmas even "by acknowledged leaders like Karl Barth, C. S. Lewis, and Emil Brunner" fail because they are "purely unsupported dogmatic" statements. It is here that we get the fundamental fallacy which, so to speak, find so much weight with literary men like Mr. Rowland, and which first makes them sit on the fence before eventually tumbling over on the wrong side. It is that the three gentlemen named are "leaders" or "authorities." As one who has sometimes analysed books published by similar authorities, I can only say that they turn out as many "unsupported and dogmatic statements" as they find mugs to listen to them. These people are only authorities or leaders to those who blindly follow them without analysis.

He and I and all fathers and mothers must look with horror at the atom bomb—but it may have to be used to put a stop to "ideologies" which, in the opinion of those who believe in them, are necessary to save the world.

In the past it was religion—the religion which Mr. Rowland may one day accept in all its tenets—which at the behest of its (so-called) founder was to be forced on to mankind. Men, women and children were tortured and massacred to placate one whom one reverent Rationalist calls a "peasant reformer." In his name, auto da fes were made a pleasant spectacle for all true believers; and it took many centuries of fierce fighting all over Europe before God's servants were compelled to give up their God-like Inquisition. Millions of lives were lost in the process, and the misery these religious wars caused, and their frightful inhumanity, can never be assessed. Gradually religion gave way to "class war," and now we have precisely the same Inquisition under another name in many parts of the world.

Karl Marx taught that revolutionary terrorism must be kept up as long as possible, and in this he has millions of faithful followers who are just as religious as those who fought in the Middle Ages and supported the Catholic version. That it may force us to "believe" with the threat of atom bombs, I am obliged to admit. And I must admit also that I cannot see how the threat will be removed by appeals in prayer to God—by joining the Unitarians or the Catholics. Mr. Rowland thinks he will be safer against the atom bomb if he has religion to support him—like Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Sheila Kaye-Smith and Clare Boothe Luce. (He should have added Mr. Poynter.) I feel that no abject submission to any Church or to any "ideology" can give us any "certainty" or "safety." Reason, knowledge, calm analysis, and a recognition of the danger that a terrific increase in population in a world which has been systematically robbed of its riches and cannot expand gives us, are the only ways in which we can meet, from the intellectual point of view, the threat to world peace.

And the way to meet the threat of armed warfare is to be prepared to hit back—"an eye for an eye."

H. CUTNER.

"Providence" has made many mistakes in this world, and one of the greatest was letting John Calvin be anything but a Scotsman. North of the Tweed was his proper home. He and John Knox were two fine companions. Colonel Ingersoll says that they fitted each other like the upper and lower jaws of a wild beast.

G.W.F.

STEPS TO SANITY

IV.—Conclusion.

THE act of war has in the past been undertaken with a universal consciousness of its lack of morality but with a profound belief in its efficacy.

A nation could follow the path of expediency and survive, perhaps to reign in temporary economic and physical supremacy over its fellows. Or it could follow the path of morality and succumb to those which believed in expediency.

But the efficacy of the machinery we use is no longer the yard-stick of its value. For it has been found that each new flower we grow is affected by the manner of its growing. That it is, for example, quite impossible to achieve political and economic freedom, by means of a machine which has been deliberately created for the purpose of suppressing them.

Nothing can be done with bombs, bayonets or bullets, except destroy.

Man naturally and instinctively recoils from the potential horror of the atomic and hydrogen bombs. But this is not a new reaction. He has always so reacted when his steep and tedious climb to higher levels has been disturbed by war or threat of it. So divorced is man, by nature, from the ignoble art of slaughter and destruction, that every artifice and wile and every known form of coercion has had to be employed by his misleaders, in order to induce him to undertake it.

And always, of course, it was in a "Noble" cause.

But when the summit of victory was reached or the valley of defeat, the promised vista proved to be a mirage and a gaping crater, torn in the fabric of man's total endeavour, was the sole reward.

But if the sirens sound once more, their mournful wailing will announce the settling day; the payment of the ultimate price; extinction.

For the converging paths of expediency and morality have at last met and for civilisation there is now but a single route to follow if it is to continue to exist.

For Britain, but a single road to tread if Britain wants to live.

The real value of any political, economic or social order we may hope to achieve is the measure of its affinity with normal human relationship, judged in the light of the highest conceivable ethical standards; which standards result from the true conception of man as the highest known form of existence of dignified man.

This test precludes the use of war in the onward march of Man, and renders it's exclusion from Britain's future programme not only moral and expedient, but the next and perhaps final step to sanity.

BRITAIN SHOULD PROCLAIM TO THE WORLD HER INTENTION NEVER AGAIN TO RESORT TO WAR—IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WHATSOEVER.

THE PEOPLE WANT PEACE.—A plebiscite will prove it.

THE PEOPLE WANT PEACE.—What can we do with the countless millions of pounds worth of arms if not make war?

THE PEOPLE WANT PEACE.—Then what, in the name of sanity, do we want with a Secretary of State for War?

What use can we find for a Defence Minister, except to confirm that Britain is now indefensible?

BRITAIN'S NEED IS FOR A MINISTER FOR PEACE, NOT WAR. AND A MINISTER FOR PEACE HAS NO NEED OF A POCKETFUL OF LETHAL ARGUMENT.

The way to progress lies wide open still.

There are many signs that the social-conscience of mankind for so long subjugated to false values is at last astir.

It needs but the final incentive to its complete emergence; the existence of completely reliable moral leadership and example. And this Great Britain is best fitted to supply.

If she is great enough to accept this challenge now; if, in the name of humanity and because she has dared so much already, in far less worthy causes, Great Britain renounces for ever the use of war, she will deserve the homage which posterity will pay to her.

But to-morrow, if she dawdles with atomic death, she will become entitled to that respect of any future generation there may be, which she will earn only by virtue of her belated acceptance of the inevitable.

And if Britons ever dared to chant again, on bended knee amongst the blood and ruin,

"They shall not grow old as we who are left grow old.

Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,

We shall remember them."

Then "they" will be justified in calling to us from their graves.

LIARS. HYPOCRITES. COWARDS. TRAITORS.
C. E. PALMER.

RELIGION AND THE FUTURE

MOST of those who try to maintain a reasonable balance between theological extremes would say that the religious "die-hard" has little to say which is of value to the world. And one of the troubles of the B.B.C. is that it tends to give the religious "die-hard" far more than his religious share of the air. A recent book, however, appears to suggest that even among those clerics who have the regular ear of the B.B.C. there are alert minds and eager thinkers. Canon V. A. Demant is not as well known among non-members of the Church of England as he deserves to be, but I think that his *What is Happening to Us?* (Dacre Press; 2s. 6d.) may well get him a mass audience which, if not as large as that of Mr. C. S. Lewis, will probably be more intelligent.

There is nowhere a statement that Canon Demant's little book is made up of broadcast talks; but there is some internal evidence to suggest that this was so. And I am not at all sure, in that case, that they are not the most important talks on religious and cognate issues that the B.B.C. broadcast for a long time.

Canon Demant's attitude is broadly that what we are facing in the mingled political-economic-religious-international crisis of our time is nothing less than a breakdown of a civilisation. He shows that there is a good case to be made out for this in the wider matters, and even applies it to such apparently minor things as the way in which the mass production of cars inevitably leads to chaos in the traffic of our great cities, until the man with a car takes longer to get (say) from Oxford Circus to Marble Arch in London than the man who walks.

Naturally, Canon Demant links up this breakdown in the general attitude towards civilised living with the decline in religious belief and observance which has set in during the past century or so. He considers that the tradition on which our western civilisation has (perhaps almost unconsciously) been based is a tradition which incorporates elements that are Christian, elements that are Humanist, and elements that derive from the classical outlook of ancient Greece and Rome. And, whatever we feel about the truth or otherwise of the Christian message, I think that it is difficult to gainsay the truth of that analysis.

And likewise it leads to the view, which Canon Demant expresses in typically religious terms by saying: "Pride is the fundamental sin." In other words, what has gone wrong to the world is that men have wished to go their own way, ignoring the wishes of their friends and neighbours, particularly their friends and neighbours in other countries. That was the trouble with Hitler; that is the trouble to-day alike with the people in power in the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. And I do not think that Canon Demant's analysis of the situation can well be bettered. As to his solution—well, there two opinions are, of course, possible—Christians hold that the solution must be a religious one—in Canon Demant's words, we have "to put ourselves to school at the lessons we have skipped." Freethinkers would hold, on the contrary, that the solution must be a political and economic one. But I think that Christians and Freethinkers alike will find the diagnostic picture given by Canon Demant worthy of attention.

JOHN ROWLAND.

FREETHOUGHT DICTIONARY

SAGACITY.—Discriminative intelligence. As, for instance, the ability to distinguish falsehood from truth.

For the whole of his life the average man is surrounded by a conspiracy of lies. This does not apply to any single country; it is world-wide. From the time he can talk he is told fairy tales, which condition him to the more or less similar romances which will be related to him, in varying degrees of solemnity, to the very end.

As he outgrows Jack and the Beanstalk or Goldilocks, he encounters one or other of the various superstitions connected with religion. These, and such fairy tales as Cinderella, are never really outgrown. They remain with him in one form or other, right through life, or, at any rate, his useful life.

With schooldays he encounters history. In every country, this, at its best, is nothing but distorted facts; hardly to be distinguished from barefaced lies. Compare the English accounts of the American War of Independence or the Boer War with those of the American or South African school books, and see if the two versions can possibly be reconciled. Compare French and German school history books from say, Bismarck, to the present day.

Passing through school, he reaches politics. These, in every country and of whatever party, range from distortion of fact to "terminological inexactitudes." More than this, the man's own politics usually depend on such a mere chance as his favourite comic strip. He buys the paper for the strip and forms his politics from views expressed in other columns. Not only has he no opinion of his own; he is incapable of forming one. His education has never progressed as far as teaching him how to assess two conflicting policies, or even the complete implications of any proposed policy.

This incurable romantic now looks round him in an attempt to satisfy the sex urge. Here he encounters the few rare glimpses of reality he is destined to come in contact with. But here again, the lies he has encountered right throughout his life, exact their toll. Booby traps were not invented in the last war. They are at least as old as Neolithic man, and their middle name is woman.

Woman's conditioning from birth teaches her to regard man as an ass, deserving of her pity as long as he does not thwart her will. Let him strut and caper as he will before them—there is, in any feminine assembly, an

undereurrent of amused toleration. "We need the brute; let's make the best of him," just about sums up their attitude.

Well, this antagonist is man's nearest encounter with reality, from which he never emerges a victor. Either he regards the woman of his choice as a Cinderella, with himself cast as Prince Charming; or he takes the cave man attitude. In either case the lady humours his ego until she has him firmly hooked, when, with a sigh of satisfaction, she can relax and begin to mould him to the heart's desire. Which is to say, she can let some home truths out of the bag. But, so accustomed is her mate to specious falsity, that he indignantly rejects any such attempts at reform. To accept such truths would disturb his ego so badly as to make life intolerable. There must be a compromise. Naked reality cannot be faced.

F. W. RENNIE.

SCIENCE, RELIGION AND MORALS

1. Comparative Religion

(1) In modern times the subject of Comparative Religion has been studied increasingly on a systematic basis.

(2) Since Edward Gibbon wrote his great work critical investigators have been methodically studying this subject.

(3) During this century and a-half or so all the great religions of the world have been opened up to public consideration.

(4) These studies have been pursued along historical, textual and interpretative lines with increasing intensity.

(5) This has resulted not only in learned criticism but also in changed views on the part of the less learned.

(6) In its early years the Christian religion was subjected to some drastic and acute criticisms.

(7) During the first few centuries of its existence this new religion was divided and constantly on the defensive.

(8) In time, by a process of unification, it became the sole, or at least the predominant religion, of the Western World.

(9) Criticism was suppressed and the Western Nations, consequently, never questioned the truth of Christianity.

(10) Only since the Reformation have its critics increased in number and its study been systematised.

(11) For something like a thousand years, say from 500 A.D. to 1500 A.D., Christianity was accepted in Europe.

(12) There were different Churches and varying faiths, but Christian fundamentals were almost unchallenged.

(13) The so-called "spiritual" atmosphere of Europe, and later of America, was overwhelmingly orthodox.

(14) The general view was that Christianity was unique as a religion and essential to salvation.

(15) In spite of internecine strife in some areas, the Christian religion remained predominant.

(16) Since the beginning of the twentieth century the critical study of Christianity has considerably increased.

(17) Investigations have become widespread and the subject of Comparative Religion treated scientifically.

(18) Consequently, those Christians who really study their religion are faced with a new situation.

(19) They have had to realise that their religion is neither as unique nor as universal as they imagined.

(20) Much of its theology, morality, devotions and liturgy were shown to be copies of those of older religions.

(21) Investigations showed that belief in Saviour-Gods had existed in earlier religious centuries previously.

(22) Legends of the Fall of Man, Incarnations, Atone-ments and Resurrections of Saviours, all existed before Christianity.

(23) The whole soteriological system of Christianity was seen to be but an amended version of earlier systems.

(24) Even Christian rites and ceremonies were so similar to ancient ones that it was difficult to distinguish them.

(25) The parallels in all these were so close that the question arose what was original in Christianity?

(26) Many of these similarities were commented on in the early years of Christianity and ingeniously explained.

(27) Modern investigators have greatly extended the knowledge of them and classified them more scientifically.

(28) They cannot now be dismissed as machinations of the Devil or mere pagan anticipations.

(29) The hieroglyphics of the Egyptians and the clay tables of Babylonians are more than mere legends.

(30) They are scientific achæological evidence still existing and not mere tales brought from foreign lands.

(31) It is impossible and unnecessary to consider this ever growing mass of historical evidence here.

(32) Numerous books on the subject of Comparative Religion provide ample opportunity for this study.

(33) It is to be expected that the testimony of this evidence and its impartial interpretation will be disputed.

(34) This will be done on the one hand by those who are interested in maintaining ancient religions.

(35) It will be done on the other hand by those who accept their religion without studying its bases.

(36) The results of investigations by the learned, in time, percolate downwards to the unlearned masses.

(37) By a slow process of infiltration, which is often unconscious, such knowledge slowly permeates society.

(38) Ancient beliefs still linger in the minds of many people by reason of the inertia which characterises ignorance.

(39) Even to-day some fundamental scientific theories are unknown to those who remain persistently unscientific.

(40) Nevertheless, ideas on Comparative Religion are spreading, as other scientific ideas have spread in the past.

(41) The movements of what is called "public opinion" in religion, as in science, are too complex to discuss here.

(42) That such movements are now occurring rapidly, even orthodox believers in religion have to admit.

(43) This applies to every great religion in the world and to Christianity probably more than any other.

(44) Apologists explain that these changes do, and should, occur because religion is a living movement.

(45) Such an admission is of considerable interest to those who study religious developments scientifically.

(46) Comparative Religion includes the study of all these various religions by this method, objectively and impartially.

(47) These investigations form a historical science; not the advocacy of a foregone conclusion.

(48) Where religion is purely and entirely a matter of personal subjectivity it might seem outside science.

(49) Even these subjective beliefs, however, can be studied by others objectively as religious psychology.

(50) This increasingly important aspect of the study of religion will be alluded to in due course.

BOOKS RECOMMENDED AND REFERENCES

"The Paganism in our Christianity," by Arthur Weigall (Hutchinson). An excellent short summary.

"Pagan Christs," by John M. Robertson (Watts).

W. EDWARD MEADS.

CORRESPONDENCE

AN APPRECIATION

Sir.—Like H. Purdy, who writes an appreciation of J. Effel's articles in *The Freethinker*, of 20th August, perhaps I may be allowed to add my tribute.

As a young man I was reared in an orthodox Christian home and was taught to believe that if I were not "saved" I was in danger of hellfire, which would eternally torment me for ever and ever and ever.

Chancing to come across *The Freethinker* on the Public Library table, I glanced at it and was impressed. I continued to read it week after week, and after a while my eyes were opened by its contents—especially the "profane jokes" which were, in the early 'nineties of last century, a feature of the paper. I became convinced that all religions were simply superstitions, mere fairy tales, of the type of "Jack the Giant Killer," and the jokes helped me to laugh these old wives' tale out of existence.

It is because of this experience that I value the articles of your contributor, J. Effel. He wields a light rapier which gets there every time, while more serious matter—although also most necessary—is either left unread or does not prick the bubble of superstition in the same effective way as J. Effel's light-hearted method of spearing the giant in his tracks, if I may be permitted to mix my metaphors!

May J. Effel's shadow—and his articles—never grow less. They give us light and learning. They add to the "gaiety of the laity." They shine like a bright light in the darkness of a priest-ridden world.—Yours, etc.,

BILL SPARK.

CHRISTIANITY AND FREETHOUGHT

Sir.—Your correspondent, Mr. John Rowland, evidently bears a grudge against the Freethought movement. In his letter in *The Freethinker*, 20th August, 1950, he poses the question: "Is Freethought such a purely destructive force as has sometimes been thought?" Of course, so long as it is only sometimes thought to be destructive, no harm is done, but when this stupid lie appears in print, even although it is put in the form of a "question," as in this instance, the implication is that, *Freethought is a purely destructive force*. We are not told what it is that Freethought destroys, nor does he mention by whom it is thought to be destructive, therefore we can only assume that it is John Rowland who thinks so. If Mr. Rowland can offer any evidence in support of his "question," there is no doubt that this "destructive force" publication will willingly publish it. In reality, Mr. Rowland is reviving an old religious falsehood in a Christianlike, i.e., underhand, manner; what Shakespeare might call, "stuffing the ears of men with false report." This is not the first time that Mr. Rowland has brought the question to light. On page 775 of *The Freethinker*, dated December 29, 1940, Mr. Chapman Cohen makes some critical remarks about an interview that took place between Dr. Julian Huxley and Mr. Rowland. Quote: "Mr. John Rowland has done Dr. Huxley a distinct disservice in publishing an account of an interview with him." At the opening of the interview Dr. Huxley is reported to have said, "I am not a Christian and do not believe in God . . . It must be admitted that in the past Freethought and Rationalist organisations performed work that was primarily destructive." Commenting on these and other statements which are said to have been made at the interview, Mr. Cohen continues: "We fancy we know just a little more of Freethought and Rationalist organisations than does Dr. Huxley, but in case our acquaintance with them is faulty, we should really be obliged to know of any such organisation, or any leader in such movements that ever was or aimed at being primarily destructive. That remark of Dr. Huxley is one of the cheapest, the stalest, and most wholly untruthful of Christian Evidence slanders. . . . Mr. Rowland closes his remarks by saying that Dr. Huxley had incidentally given utterance to several ideas which should prove most useful for the Rationalist movement in its future progress. Oh, artful, sarcastic Mr. Rowland! For ideas may be useful in the warning they give to avoid as well as advising what we are to follow. Mr. Rowland evidently has a strain of sarcasm in his make-up."

Although you can never tell the truth till you believe it a lie, you can tell a lie till you believe it the truth. See what I mean?—Yours, etc.,

J. HUMPHREY.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held September 7, 1950

The President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Griffiths, A. C. Rosetti, Ridley, Morris, Johnson, Ebury, Woodley, Corstorphine, Barker, Hornibrook, Mrs. Quinton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Birmingham and North London Branches and to The Parent Society. Plans for the holding of public meetings on the question of Secular Education in State Schools were discussed. Arrangements for a lecture from Professor H. Levy were confirmed. Reports of lectures given were noted from Messrs. Brighton, Clayton, Mosley, Ridley, and from Bradford, South London, and Lewisham Branches. A lecture visit to Glasgow by Mr. F. A. Ridley was sanctioned. Correspondence from the Broadcasting Committee was under discussion.

The formation of a branch of the N.S.S. in Norwich was raised and a line of action decided upon.

Further Press advertisements of the Society were outlined and instructions given.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, October 5, and the proceedings closed.

JOHN SEIBERT, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—7-45 p.m.:

Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Messrs. A. ELSMERE and T. M. MOSLEY.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. A. CALVERLEY and L. EBURY (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Freedom and Social Control," Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

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