

# THE FREETHINKER

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*Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,  
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions

The Origin of Gods

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

ity. The very existence of the output of books to prove gods exist is, in itself, a demonstration that doubt is there and grows.

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Is God Irrelevant?

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

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

The very word "God" is an illustration of this. What is meant by it? Those who use it do so as though it carried as definite a meaning as gravitation. The truth is not only the meanings are attached to "God" almost as various as those who use it, but no one appears to know what the word originally meant, or if they do the original sense of it is carefully hidden by godites lest it should expose the very basis of religion. A standard dictionary says that the origin of the word is unknown, but that it is probably an Aryan word meaning, that to which sacrifice is made; one of a class of powerful spirits regarded as controlling a department of nature or of human activity. Now I am strongly inclined to believe that this definition was intended to hide—to the godite—a very unpleasant truth. It does not quite succeed because it lets loose the enlightening fact that whatever the origin of the word it stands for a belief in someone or something to whom, or to which, sacrifice was made. But, of course,

no savage was ever so unthinking as to offer sacrifice to a stone that was no more than a stone, or to the sun if he did not think that the sun was more than a mass of heated matter. Sacrifice implies the belief that the thing to which sacrifice is made desires the sacrifice and is pleased with it; and the one who sacrifices does it out of thankfulness for favours received, favours to come, or for fear of punishment if the sacrifices are not made. This is the very A.B.C. of human motive, but when dealing with godites, particularly with the well educated literary ones, one must make things as simple as possible if one is to be understood.

Our definition is illuminative on a very important point when it states the subsidiary clause of the definition; God is "one of a class of powerful spirits controlling a department of nature." In that we get to the very core of the matter. We have been admitted to the inner sanctuary of the laboratory in which the gods are made. But if that had been stated plainly, and with nothing else, if the introductory clause concerning the word had been omitted, we should have been left with the sentence "that to which sacrifice is made," etc. And that, as the screen American would say, "spills a mouthful." The idea of gods has been maintained under false pretences. Familiarity has played its part. People have accepted the idea for so long, it has bitten so deeply into human thought and social institutions that the majority have been content with a mere name. The idea of the savage has been perpetuated. The environment of the savage has been dissipated, but the magic of a word induces large numbers to behave as though we still live in a forest clearing and science was unborn.

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#### The Cradle and the Grave

The definition of "God" we have cited is as near an understanding as one can get. It implies the conditions in which the idea of gods originated. It assumes a society in which nothing is known of the constitution of nature, when man believes that he is at the mercy of a number of powerful spirits on whom he is dependent for everything. He bribes them with sacrifices, with prayers, with ceremonies. If his sacrifices and petitions are followed by good results he has all the proof possible that these spirits exist. If good results do not follow, that is still evidence to the same end. This is a plain account of all the gods, ghosts, angels, devils, and "spiritual" existences that have ever bothered the minds of men and women from the dawn of humanity until 1940.

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

deliberately that the man who does not recognize this is incapable of drawing the logical inference from the position of Tylor and his successors.

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

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

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

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

CHAPMAN COHEN

Truth is a mighty power—a lie may keep it in the background and hide it; but it cannot be blotted out.

Petrarch

## Robert the Devil

Hail to the steadfast soul  
Which, unflinching and keen,  
Wrought to erase from its depth  
Mist and illusion, and fear.—*Matthew Arnold*

ROBERT BUCHANAN (1841-1901) always bulked largely in the literary arena of his own time. He was not only a considerable poet, but an accomplished dramatist, a successful novelist, and a slashing critic. Even during the most strenuous part of a hard career he never forgot his high ideals, and he always put good work into what he did. Once, perhaps, in one of his articles, he uttered something like a cry of despair. He quoted the biting line from Alfred de Musset, "the dead young poet whom the man survives." This line, pregnant with meaning, would apply to so many writers who have started on their careers full of enthusiasm, but who have outlived their early ideals. But Buchanan was made of sterner stuff, and notwithstanding his fighting career, was always full of enthusiasm, and retained his high ideals to the last.

In Browning's expressive phrase, Buchanan was "ever a fighter." Cradled in poverty, he fought his way at the pen's point to an enviable position in the literary world. Much of his tenacity he owed to his father, a Glasgow journalist, a militant Freethinker, and a follower of Robert Owen. The boy's education was not ordinary, for he was brought up without religious instruction, and it was not until he reached manhood that he became familiar with the tortuous creeds of many churches. He never acquired any faith in theology, and became extremely critical of Christianity. In his poetic masterpiece, *The Wandering Jew*, he pictures a Christ grown old and dismayed by the wicked deeds of his followers. This poem was "his favourite child." He began it in 1866, but did not publish it till near the end of his life. It is his highest poetic flight, and it is the most anti-Christian poem in English literature.

Young Buchanan came to London, and commenced that struggle with fortune in which he was ultimately victorious, although his early privations left a deep and lasting impress on his sensitive nature. The privations were real enough. Once, whilst waiting in a publisher's office, he fainted for want of food. Nor was this an isolated instance. For in those far-off days men too often cultivated journalism on a little oatmeal. Christie Murray has told us that, in those days, when pressmen had not ceased to be pariahs, in a group of well-known journalists, himself included, each admitted having had, at one time or the other, to sleep in the open air, or, at "The Hotel of the Beautiful Star," as he wittily phrased it. Henry Murray, his brother, recounted that at one time he shared a room with another man, and, when money was scarce, they had only one suit of clothes between them, the pawnbroker having the other. Since the other man was the bigger, and that suit was his, it was a case of David in Saul's armour.

Buchanan had a good conceit of himself. One publisher wailed: "I can't stand that young fellow. He talks to me as if he were Almighty God and I were a mere worm." Buchanan had the defect of his qualities, but he won the fight unaided. A literary Ishmael, every man's hand was against him. This position has its distinct advantages. Buchanan kept his sword sharp, and he always struck hard. His appearance in the literary arena always meant real fighting. When he attacked Christianity it was in no half-hearted or mealy-mouthed fashion. He threw himself against the personality of the Nazarene, and penned in *The Wandering Jew* a most tremendous

indictment of Christ rarely, if ever, surpassed in a thousand years of English literature.

In the dialectical encounters that followed, Buchanan held his own bravely, and his opponents left the arena scarred and hurriedly. Always a most humane and sensitive man, his objections to Christianity were as much ethical as intellectual. He often got some very startling effects in his writings by this union of intellect and emotion. Listen to this description of "God in Piccadilly":—

Poisonous paint on us, under the gas  
Smiling like spectres, we gather bereaven,  
Leprosy's taint on us, ghost-like we pass,  
Watched by the eyes of yon pitiless heaven.  
Let the stars stare at us! God, too, may glare at us  
Out of the void where he hideth so well—  
Sisters of midnight, he damned us in making us,  
Cast us like carrion to men, then forsaking us,  
Smiles from his throne on these markets of Hell."

The same idea is elaborated in a striking sonnet addressed to "Our Father in Heaven":—

Oh, thou art pitiless! They call thee Light,  
Law, Justice, Love, but thou art pitiless.  
What thing of earth is precious in thy sight  
But weary waiting on and soul's distress?  
When dost thou come with glorious hands to bless  
The good man that dies cold for lack of thee?  
Where bringest thou garlands for our happiness?  
Whom dost thou send but Death to set us free?  
Blood runs like wine—foul spirits sit and rule  
The weak are crushed in every street and lane  
He who is generous becomes the fool  
Of all the world, and gives his life in vain.  
Were thou as good as thou art beautiful  
Thou could'st not bear to look upon such pain.

This mocking, iconoclastic attitude annoyed the Christians exceedingly. They saw quite clearly that the underlying ethical appeal would be a more dangerous weapon in his hands than any dialectical test. Here is another example:—

Oh, what have sickly children done to share  
The cup of sorrow? Yet their dull, sad pain  
Makes the earth awful; on the tomb's dark stair  
Moan idiots, with no glimmer in the brain,  
No shrill priest with his hangman's cord can beat  
Thy mercy into these—ah nay, ah nay!  
The angels thou hast sent to haunt the street  
Are hunger and distortion and decay.  
Lord that mad'st man, and send'st him foes so fleet,  
Who shall judge thee upon thy judgment day?

Buchanan never altered his Freethought views. He was as outspoken in his later works as in his earlier ones. The judgment of Christ in *The Wandering Jew* is as impassioned as Swinburne's *Lines before a Crucifix*:—

With all the woes of earth upon thy head,  
Uplift thy cross, and go! Thy doom is said.

Buchanan always rated his poems far more highly than his novels and his other books, although the latter were very popular with the reading public. Certainly his vivid personality came out in verse more clearly than in prose. It is a far cry from *The Wandering Jew* to his *London Poems* and *The City of Dream*, but Buchanan could do almost anything in verse. His rollicking *Wedding of Shon Maclean*, and other humorous pieces, show his range. Except Rudyard Kipling no recent poet has shown such humour as Buchanan, nor is there any one who has given examples of powerful work in so many different ways. Lecky, the historian, did well to eulogize Buchanan in a Royal Academy banquet speech, for Buchanan's place in literature is little short of the giants'.

Buchanan's joy of life, his passion for nature, was at the very root of his objection to Christianity, and he has voiced his passion and his joy in most beautiful words. Nothing came amiss to him. He blew all things to melody through the golden trumpet of his

genius. Such was the brave and brilliant figure with which the Victorian era closed :

Our glorious century gone  
Beheld no head that shone  
More clear across the storm, above the foam,  
More steadfast in the fight  
Of warring night and light,  
True to the truth whose star leads heroes home.

MIMNERMUS

## Mediums and Credulity

MR. HARRY PRICE'S latest book, *Fifty Years of Psychical Research*, will stand for many years as a monument to the pathetic state of credulity which allegedly civilized people have reached after nearly two thousand years of Christianity and a couple of centuries of gradually increasing scientific knowledge. How many more centuries will have to elapse before the majority of people cease to believe the unbelievable, it is not for me to prophesy. But at least it is quite certain that "spirits" of one sort or another will continue their amorphous existence so long as men and women are capable of persuading themselves of the "truth" of that childish self-contradiction which affirms that when we die, we are not dead!

For the logical Atheist, Mr. Price's book is little more than a tiresome recital of humbug, trickery, and deliberate rascality, interspersed with a few doubtful cases of mental abnormality which cannot, perhaps, be accused of conscious deceit. It is a fairly inclusive record of the more important "mediums" who have practised their trade or hobby of serving as "mouth-pieces" for the spirits in Europe and America. To anyone but a Spiritualist it should prove an eye-opener in respect of that remarkable human propensity of believing that things are not what they are, or, conversely, that things are what they are not.

Sir Oliver Lodge is a noteworthy example in point. To quote Mr. Price: "During the Meurig Morris action against the *Daily Mail*, Sir Oliver Lodge in the witness-box said, according to the *Times* report: 'I hear about fraudulent mediums, but I have not come across them.' Sir Oliver must have forgotten his seance in 1931 with Mrs. Duncan, who was thoroughly exposed that same year." And that was not the only fraudulent medium Sir Oliver forgot.

Mr. Price himself, however, appears to be not quite immune from the failing. For, in spite of the mass of devastating evidence, he writes: "Another reason why the Fox revelations did little to damage the new movement (Spiritualism) was because *real phenomena* were being recorded through various mediums." And the italics are his—not mine.

It was this statement, early in the book, which induced me to plough conscientiously through the Index, looking up references given to every name mentioned. The purpose of this was to discover how many mediums were referred to and what was said about them. I give the results of my analysis for the benefit of any who may not wish to read the book themselves.

Total number of mediums referred to	...	171
Male mediums	...	71
Female mediums	...	100
Mediums mentioned, but no details given	...	41
Mediums not subjected to tests	...	40
Mediums subjected to tests	...	90

Regarding the genuineness or otherwise of the manifestations produced by a medium, it is useless to take as evidence those mediums concerning whom no details are given, or those who were not subjected to tests. Of the total, therefore, we need only concern ourselves with the 90 who were tested. It may be

pointed out, however, that, of the remaining 81 mediums, some refused to be tested, others insisted upon conditions which would have made the tests futile, while the majority practised at a time when scientific tests were not thought of, much less invented for the purpose. The public was being hoaxed long before the Society for Psychical Research had ever been dreamt of. But to resume.

Total number of mediums tested	...	90
Mediums failing to produce any phenomena	...	11
Mediums exposed as frauds	...	78
Mediums who passed the tests	...	1

In view of the overwhelming proportion of frauds, and of the fact that, by all the rules of common sense, a genuine spirit would be more willing to demonstrate under test than otherwise, we are forced to the conclusion that the 11 mediums who failed to produce phenomena were as fraudulent (though not, perhaps, as brazen, as the 78 who were exposed. This makes almost a 99 per cent score for fraudulency. For the Spiritualist, of course, this proves the genuineness of "spirits," though not necessarily of mediums.

But what of the one successful medium? What of this solitary, yet nevertheless triumphant, vindication of the spirits? What of this "sock in the jaw" for the sceptics?

Strange to relate, we are not even told her real name. She is known as Stella C. But why this bashfulness? Don't ask me! If I had been the success that she is said to have been, nothing would have stopped me from blazoning my real name in association with my successes. But Mr. Price tells us that she "dislikes being investigated" (which one can well understand!), and that she "scoffs at the idea that the manifestations which occur through her are the work of 'spirits.'" Well, well! If they are not due to spirits, why include her among spiritualistic mediums? Again I say—don't ask me!

It should be noted that this unique success was the first medium to be tested by Mr. Price in the laboratory which he established "to investigate in a dispassionate manner, and by purely scientific means, every phase of psychic or alleged psychic phenomena." Mr. Price adds that "during the examination of this young woman it was found that our equipment and apparatus were not sufficient for the many experiments we wished to carry out." Here we have two clues to the success. Mr. Price's ideas as to what constituted a really scientific test may have been a little—what shall I say—undeveloped, or immature, at the start. And perhaps it would have been more accurate if he had used the words "not efficient" in place of "not sufficient" when referring to his equipment and apparatus.

Pertinent support to this latter suggestion is given by the case of Rudi Schneider—described as one of the "sheet anchors of spiritualism." Rudi was investigated long after Stella C., and presumably the equipment and apparatus had been improved in the interval. Nevertheless he was a great success—until his twenty-fifth seance. To quote Mr. Price again: "Some photographs which were automatically taken . . . show that Rudi had managed to free his arm from the—admittedly—unsatisfactory control . . . the camera catching his out-stretched arm before he could get it in control again. Because of the possibility of evading control revealed by these damning photographs, many of the phenomena recorded at this last series of London, seances must be regarded as suspect."

Mr. Price is either very generous or very naïve. Why, one might ask, are the phenomena recorded in *this last series* of seances only suspect. Is there anything to show that the tests were more fool-proof in the earlier seances?

Pertinent support is also given to the view that mediums failing to produce phenomena under test must be regarded as frauds. For Mr. Price continues: "There is little more to be said concerning Rudi Schneider. . . . The S.P.R. arranged a long series of seances with him. . . . Fifty-five sittings were held and not a single phenomenon was recorded during the six months the boy was under examination."

What a "sheet-anchor" for Spiritualism! "Toy balloon" would be a more appropriate description, I think!

Yet, in spite of all this, Mr. Price can write: "Judged by the evidence, genuine telekinetic movements have been witnessed through . . . the Schneider boys." Also: "Rudi Schneider (in 1929-30) convinced me of physical phenomena." And also: "Miss Stella C. shares with the Schneider boys the honour of being one of the very few physical mediums through whom . . . convincing positive results have been obtained under good conditions of control."

It certainly takes all sorts of people to make a world. And I am beginning to believe that, in order to make some of them see the obvious, one really does require to use a sledge-hammer!

C. S. FRASER.

### "The New Koran"

REVISED versions of more or less sacred Scriptures are common enough. We who live in a Protestant Christian land are familiar with scores of revisions of what some people call the Holy Bible. Some are officially "Permitted," or "Authorized." Some are mere freaks of slangy substitutes for the stilted "genuine article." These boring imitations of the dullest book in the world permit illiterate and other inaccuracies in the form of "quotation" to pass unchallenged. Who can safely say that anything, however foolish, is not in somebody's "version"? Only a week ago a "divine" suggested that John xv. 18 "meant" that Christ's Disciples HATED Him!

Most of us are ignorant of the Roman Catholic "revisions," and of the "American" Bible, the "Child's," the "Woman's," and a hundred more. It may be unknown to some of our readers—but not to those who know Omar Khayyam—that there are at least "Two and twenty jarring sects" of Moslems. One wonders if any of our readers have come across "The New Koran" published in 1861—at least that is the date of my copy published in London in that year.

Except for internal evidence the present writer is ignorant of the origin, history and object of the volume under notice. Its sub-title is "Text-book of Turkish Reformers." It purports to be a biography and statement of the teachings of Jaido Morata. Many signs point to the actual authorship being that of the said Jaido Morata ("Of the Pacifican Friendship"), even though, like Moses, he writes his own Obituary!

There is an unexpected topicality in the "Map of Europe" facing the title-page. Believe it or not, this 1861 map shows Finland and Sweden incorporated in a "Russian Federation." It depicts Germany forming part of an "English Confederation" while the "French Confederation" swallows up Spain and Italy. The French Empire grasps all Africa, the British all Asia. And a Chapter in the New Koran (page 413), describes England and France declaring war on Russia!

The New Koran contains 600 pages divided into

Four Books, called respectively: Labours, Counsels, Questions and Duties. The Books are divided into Chapters and Verses, and bear some resemblance to other Bibles in the quaint and not wholly successful imitation of King James's English. The author or authors may be said to acknowledge (on page 401) indebtedness to the Bible by praising the clever trick of the original Fathers of the Church who dragged into one volume the New Testament and the totally irrelevant Old Testament in order to please Jews and Gentiles alike.

Like other sacred scriptures, as well as the Moral Tales of Miss Edgeworth, the New Koran contains much "Moral Teaching." Indeed it does more: it omits the immoral teachings of the Bible. Better still it has a prejudice against intolerance which does not appear in either Old or New Testament. It pays tribute to Spinoza as "The Reformer whose new inspiration was hard to the ignorant, transcending all the doctrines of ancient philosophers, confounding both Christians and Jews" (p. 24). It exposes the part played by Christian priests in anti-Semitic persecutions (to which a whole chapter is devoted).

The New Koran expressed a belief that the story of Christ's death is a Christian fabrication (Christ's historicity it does not question). It opposes Christian lies about the Jews (whose character comes in for considerable criticism).

God naturally plays a large part in this Revelation. It was God, of course, who "raised up Mohammed as well as Christ," and the hero of the New Koran was anxious to get God's decision as to whether the real "Word of God" was the Bible, the Talmud or the (old) Koran. Jaido placed a copy of each sacred work—closed—on a table, while Jaido went to sleep after asking God to reveal to him WHICH was the Simon Pure and which were the Forgeries. God, as usual, did simply nothing at all. And, as in similar cases, this encouraged the man to decide for himself (which was evidently what God intended him to do anyway). In fact he took it to mean Why not write a Bible of your own? And he wrote this Book—surely—whatever its faults—distinctly many shades better than anything Mary Baker Eddy ever said she had written but hadn't.

What if the New Koran contains almost as many *clichés* as the Bible itself—this is a fault inseparable from all Books of Moral Precepts. "Be good," "Never do anything you will be ashamed of and then you will never be ashamed of anything you do," "Always be truthful, just and well-behaved" . . . if these are not literal quotations they are more or less a summary of the tedious tendentiousness of the morally obvious wherever found.

In a sense one ought to expect great things from a new Revelation, written ages after God's previous attempts at authorship. But while it is easy to prove that Jaido is better than Jeremiah, he lacks the subtlety of Paul, and the imagination of Daniel and of the author of St. John's Nightmare. Also we miss anything as good as the "Canticles or Song of Solomon." We congratulate Jaido on omitting the vile Slave-laws of Moses, the obscenities of Ezekiel, and the lunacies of all the minor and most of the major prophets.

Jaido Morata had something of the same religion as that of Thomas Paine, except that Morata had a grudge against the Quakers, and one could never imagine Paine descending to the level of those who profess to act as Amanuenses of the Almighty.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH

## Voltaire and Theism

### III.

THERE was always one easy way of answering Voltaire: attack his moral character. This has been the favourite method of almost all Christians in dealing with "infidels." Never mind the argument, do not bother about the truth, but just go for the moral character of your opponent for all it is worth. Naturally, if there is a substratum of truth in the charges, or of they can be twisted into a semblance of truth, all the better. The chief thing to point out is that if a man definitely rejects Jesus and Christianity, he must be a scoundrel in some way. Make him a drunkard, or a swindler, or both; insist that he is a liar, or a loose liver, or a debauchee, or something, or anything; his Freethought argument can thus be made to go for nothing.

It must be confessed that in the hands of a good Christian priest or pastor this method of dealing with the infidel has often been crowned with success. One has only to recall the way in which the fame and memory of Thomas Paine were relentlessly attacked for a century by thorough Christians as a magnificent example of dealing with an unbeliever; and the same method was pursued with great acclamation against many other notable Freethinkers.

It was only to be expected that, finding Voltaire's arguments unanswerable, the wily Church should attack his private character. In this it was often helped even by sympathetic biographers who, instead of thoroughly sifting the evidence, and trying to distinguish obvious tittle-tattle from certain truth, unconsciously perhaps, were ready to admit that there might be something in the charges. We must therefore be grateful to Mr. Alfred Noyes who, in his *Voltaire*, has examined the charges with great care, dismissing most of them with contempt.

He was perhaps in a bit of a quandary. The whole object of his book is to vindicate the great French writer from the charges that he was a "mocking blasphemer," and an opponent of "true religion." But it was little use doing so if Voltaire's moral character was as black as painted by so many people, most of whom were Christians.

One of the "dreadful" charges brought against Voltaire was that he lived "in sin" with Madame du Châtelet. Now even if this were true, it could never effect his arguments against religion. Moreover it could well have been a real marriage even though not blessed by a priest or a registrar. George Eliot and George Henry Lewes braved the contumely of a stupid Victorianism in this way, but it never surely lessened the greatness of either as writers in their particular sphere. But the whole point in dealing with Voltaire and Mme. du Châtelet is that there seems to be no evidence that there was anything between them but what is known as pure Platonic friendship. Voltaire was not a young man when he first went to her home at Cirey, and he was nearly always weak and ailing. In addition, there was a living husband in the case, and Cirey happened to be his home as well, and he happened to be nearly always there. Mr. Noyes rejects with disdain the "evidence" produced mostly by scandal-mongers as to the relationship of Voltaire and the lady, and his chapters dealing with the incident are extremely convincing. As he says:—

When we read the things written about the life at Cirey by superficial visitors or discharged servants, or the writers who rely upon them, and when we turn to the glimpses of reality that we discover in the

works of Voltaire himself, or in the letters that he wrote to private friends with whom he was on intimate terms, we are in different worlds. . . . The epistle to Madame du Châtelet [in *Alzire*] does suggest something in the way of dignity, something of an ideal, something of the high level on which Voltaire himself regarded their unusual relationship. It does this with a complete absence of smirking that almost startles us as a wild incongruity (even to the public aspects of this relationship) if we have too readily accepted the common accounts, or formed a too hasty impression of what Mr. Lytton Strachey called Voltaire's "eternal grin."

Mme. du Châtelet was a highly intellectual woman who recognized the genius of Voltaire, and who was in fact greatly indebted to him. In the end, she "fell" for another man and died, shortly after giving birth to a child. It was a pathetic tragedy, and the whole story is treated with great care and delicacy by Mr. Noyes. He dissents very strongly from Carlyle's accounts in his *Frederick the Great*, and proves how much Carlyle was influenced by quite unreliable "authorities." Mr. Noyes prefers what he calls "windows" through which we can be sure of capturing the thoughts of Voltaire—the windows being "the letters of Voltaire himself to his intimate friends at the time. They give us few external details; but they were written spontaneously and at the moment; they give us a wealth of psychological detail; they enable us to hear the very tone of his voice; and they bring us into closer touch with the situation than could any memoirs written at a later date. . . ." Mr. Noyes deals also with one or two other "discreditable" incidents, and he has very little difficulty in showing what the truth really was, and how actually it was because of Voltaire's attacks on religion that the aspersions on his private character were made. Mr. Noyes, in fact, has done for Voltaire in this matter what Moncure Conway did for Thomas Paine in his famous biography of that great Freethinker.

Finally, we get some excellent chapters on Voltaire's return in triumph, after his long exile in Ferney, to the Paris he had left so many years before. No king, or even world conqueror, could have been received with greater or wilder enthusiasm than was Voltaire by the French public. His magnificent defence of Calas and La Barre to say nothing of his reputation as one of the glories of French literature roused the excitement of the people to tremendous heights—all very well described by Mr. Noyes. Voltaire had certainly come into his own, but there can be no doubt that he paid for his great triumph with his life. Had he remained quietly in Ferney without excitement he might well have lived on for some years longer. The chief interest for us, however, is what Mr. Noyes calls "the death-bed department" of Voltaire about which he points out volumes have been written. He adds:—

Many of the tales are hopelessly conflicting. Many more—as Carlyle remarked—are foolish. Not a few of them are unspeakably vile and as false as they are filthy. Carlyle was for complete silence on this part of the subject, though—as usual—he went on to say a good many true and pointed things about it. He arrived at several definite conclusions—among them, for instance, this perfectly true one—that "the conduct of the Parisian clergy, on that occasion, seems totally unworthy of their cloth." . . . On the whole the statement is entirely just; and all the more so because it affirms, by the word "unworthy" that the clergy in question were untrue to their own august institution, and disloyal to the Master of Compassion by whom it was founded.

The enquiring reader will find in G. W. Foote's *Infidel Death-Beds* a true account of what happened, and

will therefore be able to appreciate to the full the lying accounts broadcasted by the "unworthy" Paris clergy. Incidentally, this description of God's representatives on earth must have made Mr. Noyes' fellow Catholics squirm. To get such a description from Protestants or Freethinkers is, in truth, bad enough; but from a convert. . . ! Mr. Noyes says again:—

Fanaticism has invented a thousand legends about those last hours. Most of them are foolish or vile enough to destroy their own credit and that of their inventors. In one of them Voltaire is said to have seen the devil at the end of his bed, and disliked him. . . . The depths of degradation to which his enemies could sink were revealed in the account given by the *Gazette de Cologne*. . . .

Voltaire's adopted daughter, who was present, told Lady Morgan later that the accounts given by the priests—except that of the Abbé Gaultier—were utterly false. Voltaire with his dying breath pushed away one of the interfering priests present, crying "Let me die in peace." He did *not* recant.

Mr. Noyes must be congratulated on the way he deals with these incidents, and his courage in not mincing words describing the outrages on decency and tolerance performed by Catholics surrounding the old Freethinker during his last days. It could not have been a pleasant task. Freethinkers have always protested against the lies circulated by genuine Christians about "infidel death-beds." It is good to find that at last, if only in the case of Voltaire, some Catholic can be found to admit we were right after all.

It is only fair to Mr. Noyes to point out that he is forced to conclude that he "does not think for a moment that we can enclose Voltaire, *intellectually*, in any religious formula." No amount of trying to explain that sentence away can really place Voltaire into the Christian scheme. He *was* a Theist, and perhaps he also believed in immortality. But he did not achieve his reputation as a "mocking blasphemer" without at least showing what his logical mind and analytical powers made of the current religion. We can well leave it at that.

H. CUTNER

## Aoid Drops

When genuinely religious leaders are writing for, or speaking to, their own, that is, to an audience they know have certainly not the desire, even if they have the ability to criticize what is placed before them, we are able to see real religion in all its primitive absurdity. First we take the Rev. A. H. Rees explaining God's purpose in a sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral. He says that God's purpose in creation is "nothing else but the worship of Him who made the world." That is, of himself. When a man gathers round him a crowd of people who spend their time praising him for what he has or has not done, he presents a perfectly sickening picture in which the toadies are not less contemptible than the one who delights in their adulation. But with real religion the louder the praise, and the lower men prostrate themselves, the greater their piety.

The second piece of clotted bosh comes from the Roman Catholic organ, the *Universe*. This paper reminds its readers:—

It is well to remember that God, who made the world in a week, did not regard it a waste of time to spend thirty years making kitchen utensils at Nazareth. Of course, if one third of God Almighty ever came into the world after a period of gestation, and went through all the stages of babyhood and childhood, he must have had the same experience as other children. The infant God would have teething pains and stomach troubles; he

would as he grew up get into the petty troubles that children usually get into; he would have been spanked and praised, and so forth. Of course that is not the infant Jesus that is presented—but he must have been there. And as the husband of Mary—who was not the father of Jesus—was a carpenter, it is not an unreasonable assumption that he worked with his father until he took up the occupation of a travelling preacher. But where on earth did the *Universe* get the information that Jesus spent all his life, from babyhood, in making kitchen utensils?

The only record of what Jesus did in the workshop is contained in one of the Apocryphal gospels. Joseph was ordered by the King of Jerusalem to make a throne of a particular size. After working for two years at it, the throne was found to be too small by four spans, and Joseph was afraid. Then Jesus said to him:—

Fear not, neither be cast down. Do thou lay hold of one side of the throne, and I will the other, and we will bring it to its just dimensions.

And when Joseph had done as the Lord Jesus said, and each of them with strength drawn his sides, the throne obeyed, and was brought to the proper dimensions of the place.

Which miracle, when they who stood by saw they were astonished and praised God.

But we do not remember Jesus making kitchen chairs. Still anyone who can swallow the baby beginning to make kitchen chairs and keeping it up until he was thirty, need not stumble at the expanding throne. He may, like the people who saw the trick, be astonished, but he need not disbelieve. Anyone who can believe properly should be able to swallow a large sized refrigerator.

Miracles have invaded the present war. So magnificent are the triumphs of Christian guns and Christian bombs that we expect soon to hear that no Atheist will ever again be allowed to intrude into our defensive forces. We reprint the story recorded by *The Guardian*, a journal which, as the literary guardian of God's own Church, ought to know all about it. It is only fair to say that *The Guardian* does not claim to have received any revelation direct from the Heavenly front. In fact its only authority is the wife of some unnamed theological professor somewhere in Finland, who testifies thus:

Our Christmas Day and New Year's Day most of us spent in cellars and bombproof rooms, but God's wonderful peace they could not take away from our hearts. It is so wonderful with all our soldiers. They are convinced of their righteous cause, and they feel that the living God is with them. One day in one place before going to the front-line they all, many hundreds, received the holy communion from their priest, and one soldier wrote to us that they had been five days and nights in the front-line and not one was killed.

According to these pious statistics the Mass ought to be served out once every five days, and thus give the army complete immunity from all war-risks. The price of a Holy Wafer seems little enough to pay for such benefits.

The Archbishop of York's remarks about the Gospels will be exceedingly popular amongst Christian eulogists. It may even be called superfluous, because we seldom find Christians attempting to *understand* gospels they are only expected to *believe*. In his "Readings In St. John's Gospel," he says:—

The student who will get the best out of this gospel is not the one who can discuss in learned fashion the intricate questions of authorship and chronology, but the one who has first learned to take the shoes from off his feet because he knows that the ground upon which he is standing is Holy Ground.

Now Dr. Temple is not mentally on the level of the ordinary clergyman; he is a man of ability, and we simply cannot conceive his having in his mind when writing this but one idea. That is if you wish to believe in the Gospel of St. John, you must do so before you read it. This is, of course, true of Christianity as a whole. But it is not so often put with such frank brutality.

Probably it is the war. Life during war-time is at a lower level than it is during times of peace, and the most stupid of decaying superstitions lift their heads when militarism holds the stage. The *Times Literary Supplement*, in a review of this book of Dr. Temple, refers to the remark that some people have regarded Christ as a "purely human and non-supernatural person," and the reviewer says:—

This view of Our Lord has now been very largely abandoned since it is recognized that the only Christ for whose existence there is any real evidence is a miraculous figure making stupendous claims.

This is just another way of writing that, judged by ordinary, historical, logical, and scientific standards, the existence of the Jesus of the New Testament is impossible. You must take him as a miraculous figure, and then everything is (religiously) all right. But this is not "real evidence," it is the kind of mental attitude that can profess belief in a stick without two ends.

A sidelight is cast on the Franco-British alliance by the Roman Catholic Bishop Doubleday. It is due to "Our Lady of Lourdes." What a pity the influence of "Our Lady" didn't work earlier and on a wider scale! There is always something incomplete and even confoundingly careless about these miracles. They happen anywhere and anyhow—just as though they are staged by a Minister of Food, or by some other Government Department. Perhaps they have taken God for a guide. That theory would explain much.

Mr. Hilaire Belloc does not like the use of the term "Roman" when applied to the Catholic Church. The Church has always repudiated the title. The Pope is the Bishop of Rome, but he is the head of the Catholic (the universal) Church. Of course the Church is not universal any more than Buddhism or Quakerism is universal. There are Catholics found in many places, and the term Roman Catholic merely distinguishes the variety that follows the Bishop of Rome from those who follow someone else. Mr. Belloc, in his explanation of the term, distorts its significance, as he does so many other phases of history, when it suits his purpose.

One objection Mr. Belloc has to the term "Roman" is that it carries an alien connotation. Of course it does. What other connotation can it carry if Christians reach the ordinary level of the law which demands the registration of the origin of goods? If we follow the New Testament Jesus was a Jew, he was born of Jews. The Bible is a Jewish collection. The customs, nearly all the ideas, the majority of the superstitions are Jewish. Accepting the orthodox presentation, Christianity was born in the East. Its connexion with Clapham or Clerkenwell is quite incidental. Mr. Belloc ought to develop an historic sense, and he would be much better if he had the beginnings of an evolutionary one.

Clare Sheridan, well-known authoress, sculptor and friend of the famous, has written an imitation of Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond*, called, *Without End*. In it she describes how she has been able to bridge the gulf between the living and the dead. Of course she does not call the dead, "dead." Of course they have been buried but that means nothing at all in Sheridan Land. These buried people are "living beyond the grave," where their bodies lie. We should be sorry to mock a Mother's love for her dead son. But we are entitled to question the discretion of authors who offer their own delusions as the basis of proof that the dead are still alive. We have no special quarrel with Spiritualists—we see no essential difference between the ancient superstitions connected with death, such as are now revived in modern Spiritualism, and the "Holy" Ghosts of the Churches. In fact the Church of England Newspaper recently described the Mass or Sacrament thus: "The Eucharist is the Church's

Divinely ordained Spiritualist Seance." We have always said so.

Glancing at the Bishop of Croydon's book: *What Is This Christianity?* we see that he calls Christianity in turn:—

An Event  
An Experience  
A Fellowship  
An Adventure  
A Society and even  
A Victory.

but omits to mention that it is also A Creed, and, let us add A Profession or Trade. He quotes Dr. Alington:—

That's the best of Christianity; it looks dead, and everyone gets ready for the funeral, and then the corpse gets up and makes a scene.

quite a good description of the Christianity of our day. We wonder how long it will be before the great (and greatly gulled) British public decide to bury this admittedly dead religion. No "corpse" ever gets up except when attached to wires pulled by those who have an improper object—mostly in order to cheat the living.

British defenders of the Roman Church in Spain have met the statements of that Church's wealth, and even domination of commercial enterprises in the peninsula, as being lies. The *Voice of Spain* prints, in its issue for January 27, a facsimile list of these holdings. Sometimes these shares are held directly by the religious orders, sometimes by nominees of the religious orders direct. The clock has been put back in Spain. The Church is once again in full power, and the results of this are carefully kept dark by our press.

Salim C. Watson is a negro who was captured by Arabs, and Stanley Paul publishes his story of "horror and excitement" under the title: *I was a Slave* (10s. 6d.). Reviewing the book for *Time and Tide*, Helen Fletcher comments bitingly:—

I suppose the doubtful comfort to be drawn from the atrocious story of Salim the Dinka's capture by Arabs and life as their slave is that whereas his woes to us seem past bearing he bore them, and survived to be prayed into Christianity by the ladies of nineteenth century Nottingham. His survival was a triumph but his conversion a pity, for whereas his pride endured whips, shackles and the indignity of being bartered for two yards of calico, it could not survive Christianity. The negro chieftain who through all his degradations had been proud and manly, must in Nottingham become as a little child, and a white one at that. His simplicity becomes disarming, his guilelessness unctuous, and Salim the Dinka emerges as a Dear Black Brother beside whom Salim the Slave looks free indeed.

Few, if any, observant colonists or pioneers will question the truth of this scathing reflection on Christian influence over natives of "heathen" lands.

Father Coughlin, America's radio priest, is being mentioned in connexion with the "Christian Front," the anti-Semitic and anti-Communist organization now subject to investigation by G-men. Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the G-men, alleges that the Christian Front trained men to steal arms and plant bombs; and it had plans to assassinate fourteen Congressmen and blow up stations, post-offices, power stations and banks. . . . True Christianity is plainly war-minded in many countries to-day, but it is quite possible that Capitalism would have been more peacefully disposed without it. The boycott and baiting of Russia had declined long ago if Religion did not seek to further a bloody crusade to reinstate Christianity. The Vatican yearns for such a "holy war," and now we have the Archbishop of Canterbury backing the Pope. What a comparatively happy—and PEACEFUL—world we might have if only militant church men departed for their heavenly home!



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. A. KEMP.—Thanks for letter, but such things are really not worth bothering about.

R. SHAKESHY.—We wish you luck in your adventures. There should be no difficulty in your having the *Freethinker* sent on. Much obliged for information. We are making use of it.

D. DALE.—We are not surprised that you received no reply to the questions you put to the Rev. Dr. Whale. He has a double way of escape. When in church he must not be contradicted. When speaking for the B.B.C. great care is taken that no direct opposition shall be tolerated. Any institution other than a Church or the B.B.C. would be ashamed to permit such hopeless stuff in the name of philosophy.

R. W. FLINT (N.Z.).—Thanks for suggestion. Will bear it in mind.

The "*Freethinker*" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to this office.

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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

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The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—

One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

## Sugar Plums

What some would call wisdom would have decided Mr. Cohen to cancel his lecture on Sunday last. He had an exceedingly bad cold with a cough that had robbed him of his sleep over night. But the engagement was filled, and all that was visible to the audience was a little more care displayed in the use of the voice and a little huskiness. But the meeting was a good one, upstairs and down there were few vacant seats, and the lecture was listened to with the closest attention and evident appreciation. The President of the Society, Mr. E. H. Hassell, took the chair with his usual ability. To-day (March 3) the speaker will be Mr. McCabe. His subject will be "Secularism and its New Psychology." As this is the 50th anniversary of the opening of the hall it should be a good meeting. The chair will be taken at 3 o'clock.

The New Zealand *Rationalist* for January is a special double number, price sixpence. The journal is well printed, nicely produced, and full of interesting matter from end to end. The *Rationalist* is a monthly journal and will be sent post free for four shillings annually. Orders may be given through the *Freethinker* office or direct from 315 Victoria Arcade, Shortland Street, Auckland, N.Z. To keep in touch with Freethought abroad, and also for the excellent value for money, Freethinkers here may be pleased to subscribe.

The issue of the New Zealand *Rationalist* just referred to contains the following:—

Some reader of the *Auckland Star's Week-End Pictorial* has paid a year's subscription to enable the *Free-*

*thinker* to be sent each week to the Rev. C. Chandler, who contributes the religious articles to the *Pictorial*. Mr. Chandler is to be congratulated upon his broadmindedness in reading something of the other side and continuing to do so from week to week. Subscribers to the *Freethinker*, however, will be amused at his verdict that much that one reads in that journal, though very readable, is very trifling. That is a statement which can easily be made but not justified in the case of the *Freethinker*, which has a band of able controllers writing on matters far from trivial. Disagreement will also be expressed with the view that most of the case put up by the journal seems to be directed against Churchianity more than against Christianity. Any suggestion that the *Freethinker* is more concerned with attacking the formulas of Christianity than the religion itself is far from the truth. The *Freethinker* is militant in its attack upon the principles of Christianity and challenges the historicity of Christ.

"What Atheists want to ask themselves," says Mr. Chandler, "is, 'Would they, if their cause were as widespread and well organized as religion, fail to betray such daring discrepancies in it as they now perceive in the Christian structure?'" Absolute perfection cannot be attained by man, but when we suppose a society in which Atheism is as well organized and as widespread as Christianity is to-day, we are supposing a society vastly in advance of that which now obtains. For we are supposing a society from which the fears and superstitions of religion are banished and where reason holds the fullest sway. Surely, though mistakes may still be made, they cannot equal, under happy conditions, the blunders of Christianity, involving as they have done the misery and suffering of millions of people!

Mr. Chandler concludes his article by saying that he hopes he will receive the *Freethinker*, and in that event he promises to read it with the same interest that he reads the religious press. We hope he will, and in that case he will have no grounds for saying he does not know the position of Freethought in the world. In our discussions with the clergy on Freethought our chief difficulty is, as we so often complain, that they are quite unacquainted with what they are attacking.

We are asked to announce that the members of Portsmouth Branch will be pleased to entertain any member of the forces, at the Kit-Cat Cafe, Albert Road, opposite King's Theatre, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 7.30 to 8.30 p.m.

Father Woodlock, the well-known Roman Catholic preacher, is very annoyed that teachers are not teaching religion in the State schools. Of course, that is not true, but a lie never stopped a Roman priest yet. He means that the religion taught in schools is not of the definitely primitive and stupid type that suits Father Woodlock and his followers. He spreads the good news that "Christ is less a reality to thousands of children than either Micky Mouse or Donald Duck." It depends upon what is meant by reality, but we are quite willing to believe that ninety per cent of healthy-minded children would rather see Donald Duck than listen to a talk about Jesus. As to the execution of a naked man by being nailed to a tree, it is certain that if the same picture were exhibited to an audience as an illustration of a kind of lynch-law, there would be a howl for its suppression on account of its brutalizing influence on the young mind.

Bishop-baiting was a permissible sport a century ago. In this week's *Sunday Times*, under *One Hundred Years Ago*, the following paragraph appears:—

Some of the papers have cavilled at the present of a Bible to the Bishop of Exeter from his admirers. We think they are wrong, for a better choice of a gift could not have been made. The Bible is a book of which the Bishop stands in need; it is clear enough that he has never read the Scriptures with that attention and humility as becomes a divine minister. Every public action of his life is in direct variance with the injunctions laid down in them.

## Besieged

A GREAT deal of trouble has been caused in this world by Kings and others stupidly thinking that the dawn could be prevented by wringing the neck of its herald—the crowing cock.

Men have been imprisoned, exiled, and executed; battles fought; cities besieged, etc., etc., to prevent the dawn of Freedom, but all in vain!

Besieged by snow lately, I was drawn, curiously into looking through the battles and sieges of history. And after considering some 1,500 battles and well over 100 sieges, I was convinced that most of them would never have happened unless—to borrow Tennyson's phrase—

Someone had blundered.

And none of them ended satisfactorily. Indeed, many of them seemed to hasten the coming of that which they were fought to prevent.

On what slight hinges an existence turns!

The snow caused me firstly to write this article, and a smoked haddock revealed, later, how I must write it. But, more anon!

Of the battles fought I have no desire to add to the above general observation. And of the sieges I wish only to make a few brief remarks about their dietetic peculiarities. This I do because of the inspiration of the aforementioned haddock. At Eyemouth, some time ago, it would have cost sixpence. At present, war, snow, and scarcity increased its value to 2s. 4d.!

How slow every nation has been to learn the simple lesson taught by the greatest siege of the world:—

There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.

Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him who ruleth among fools.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war!

(Ecc. ix. 14-18).

How un-wise, rich men make wars we know only too well. And how poor wise men are prevented from stopping them we also know.

From the first syllable of recorded time to the present day Man has always found some pretext for fighting when war seemed advantageous.

Paris, son of Priam, King of Troy, stole the wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta. Menelaus thereupon laid siege to Troy and recovered his wife, with the aid of the Greek Army, 10 years later (1184 B.C.).

Jerusalem underwent 15 sieges—53 B.C.—1841—that by Titus, A.D. 70 being a famous one.

Constantinople in the 800 years ending 1453, underwent 24 sieges.

Candia underwent a 20 years siege (1648-1669).

Londonderry (April—July, 1689): James II. taugth 30,000 Protestants the value of rats as a luxury. During the siege they sold at 7s. each!

Badajos (March 17—April 6, 1812): Like many other sieges this one would have been locked up in my *Forgettory*, but for Tom Hood's ballad:—

Ben Battle was a soldier bold,  
And used to war's alarms,  
But a cannon ball took off his legs  
So he laid down his arms.

He had promised to marry Nelly Gray, but after the siege:—

Said she I loved a soldier once,  
For he was blithe and brave,  
But I can never love a man  
With both legs in the grave.

Oh Nelly Gray, Oh Nelly Gray,  
For all your jeering speeches,  
At duty's call I left my legs  
In Badajos's breaches.

His siege of Nelly's heart proved unavailing and he hung himself—"For the second time in life enlisted in the line"; and was duly buried at Four Cross Roads:—

With a stake in his inside!

Now, if a sixpenny Eyemouth haddock could increase in value five times, practically, in a rationed period, what would it have done in Candia during a twenty years siege?

Paris, 1870-1871. The Academy of Sciences took into consideration the want of the fatty ingredients of Alimentation, and the object of its study was to show how tallow-candles and lamp oil may be rendered palatable as well as nourishing.

Dog broth and dog cutlets were common. Saddle of dog 3s. 4d. per lb. People ate their dogs with a touching devotion. Five francs were charged for a duck's liver. Rats and mice became luxuries. Fishing for rats—sewer rats—was a common task. A fat sewer rat fetched one franc, fifty centimes, while a common rat sold for one franc.

All the animals in the Zoological Gardens were killed and eaten, except the monkeys. Mr. Henry Labouchere, a besieged resident, gives a lively account of his impressions, one or two of which follows. Of the two elephants killed, their trunks sold at 45 francs a pound. Other parts 10 francs per lb. "Labby" says their flesh was tough, coarse, and oily.

In fashionable restaurants rats and mice appeared on the menu—"A Salmi of Game."

The cat with something of a flavour between rabbit and squirrel has a flavour all its own. It is delicious. I recommend those who have cats with philo-progenitive proclivities, instead of drowning kittens to eat them. Either smothered in onions or in a ragout.

They are excellent.

Of donkey: the flesh of this obstinate but weak-minded quadruped is delicious—in colour like mutton, firm and savoury. This siege will destroy many illusions, and amongst them the prejudice which has prevented many animals being eaten as food. I can most solemnly assert that I never wish to taste a better dinner than a joint of a donkey, or a ragout of a cat—*experto crede*.

Some idea of prices during the siege may be got from this list of prices ruling at the end of it: Two francs for a small shrivelled cabbage; one franc for a leek; 45 francs for a fowl; 45 francs for a rabbit (a cat!); 25 francs for a pigeon; 14 francs per lb. for sticklebacks; potatoes 2 francs per lb.; butter 40 francs per lb.; horse flesh only could be procured; last cow sold at £80.

Dr. Gordon, a Scotsman, of Strathdon, a medical commissioner in Paris, seems to have been one of the few sensible men during the siege.

He had a luxurious bicker of porridge every morning. (There was a store of oatmeal in Paris). While people generally were eating any filthy insect or animal—"I must have something that's breathed the breath of life"—was the senseless urge behind the mass, and in their opinion—this time a sensible one—"One of the advantages of being a Scotsman was the ability to take porridge."

GEORGE WALLACE

## The Myth of Judas

THE gospel account of Judas will not hold water. It is full of discrepancies, inconsistencies, and absurdities. If Jesus was as well known as the stories make out, where was the necessity of his being pointed out by the traitor's kiss? In (John xviii. 2-5), Judas is a mere bystander. He neither kisses Jesus nor points him out, but Jesus himself says to his arrester "I am he." Yet it is John who is the most virulent against Judas; says he "was a thief" (xii., 6), and attributes to Jesus the words "Have I not chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil?" (vi., 70.)<sup>1</sup> The divine discernment displayed in the choice of a devil as one of Christ's apostles—he also applied the term Satan to Peter (Matt. xvi., 23)—may excite the admiration of faith, especially as he had promised these twelve that they should sit on twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Matt. xix., 28). Jesus is said to have known who it was that should betray him, and speaks of it as "determined" (John xiii., 21; Luke xxii., 22), yet he is said to have said "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. xxvi., 24), a sentence, by the way, which excludes the hope of final salvation for the man who was the immediate cause of the redemption. So poor Judas is represented as condemned to be hanged and damned in order to fulfil the scriptures. The motive of a covetousness usually assigned for the betrayal of a God whose miracles Judas had witnessed, is so ridiculously inadequate—especially as he bore the bag, and presumably could have helped himself to more than thirty pieces of silver—that Archbishop Whately suggested he did it in order to force on the coming of the Messianic Kingdom; a supposition precluded by Jesus's own denunciations against him. And then the discrepancies as to the suicide. The account in Matthew is utterly irreconcilable with that in the Acts. Did Judas first repent, return the money and hang himself and afterwards buy a field with the money and burst asunder, or first buy a field and falling headlong burst asunder and then repent, return the money and hang himself? Papias, who lived in the middle of the second century, gives a different account of his end. He says that "Judas walked about in this world a sad example of impiety, for his body had so swollen that he could not pass where a chariot could pass easily, so he was crushed by a chariot and his bowels gushed out." This is a proof Papias did not know our Matthew. From Paul's saying that Jesus appeared to the twelve (1 Cor. xv., 5) it is probable he knew nothing of Judas's suicide.

Such considerations show that the gospel story of Judas is as much a legend as that in the gospel of the Infancy, which relates that Judas when a boy was possessed by Satan, and endeavoured to bite Jesus (chap. xiv.) But how did this legend grow? It evidently is so entwined with that of Jesus that whoever shall unravel the one will go a long way towards explaining the other.<sup>2</sup> I cannot pretend to do this, at any rate in the limits of an article, but will throw out a suggestion or so for the disentanglement of a few points, which may give the clue to some others. If the reader will give patient attention to a somewhat difficult matter, I will make amends for what he may think the conjectural character of my suggestion by winding up with an anecdote.

In the first place Judas is wanted in the Christian story as "the villain of the piece." The function of

the traitor is to set off the betrayed. An explanation was needed as to how the divine being came to get crucified. The treachery of a disciple was a natural suggestion. Jesus had been put to death, but of course he died a sacrifice, "our passover sacrificed for us." The first-born son was regarded by the Jews as devoted to God, and had to be redeemed by an offering (Exod. xiii., 13; Num. xviii., 15; Luke ii., 22). This offering Kitto tells us in his *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*,<sup>3</sup> was thirty pieces of silver. Here we have the origin of this portion of the Judas myth. The story of his hanging himself may well have come from the name Iscariot, since *Ascara* signifies strangling and *Iskarioth* means a leathern bag, and may have led to the legend of his being treasurer. Those who wish to know why the adversary of Jesus was named Judas may get a hint from *The Jesus of History and the Jesus of Tradition Identified*, by George Solomon. It is certain that the Christians were first known as Galileans (Acts i., 11; ii., 7; Luke xxiii., 6). Now the Galileans are mentioned by Josephus as a turbulent people, the followers of one Judas of Galilee (mentioned Acts v., 37), who Origen informs us was regarded by his followers as the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> The Galileans, says Josephus, were the latest sect which originated among the Jews. Their leader Judas was put to death, but his party still carried on his work (Antiq. xviii., 10; Wars ii., 8-11). Josephus, be it ever borne in mind, knew nothing of the Christians, unless he intended them by the Essenes or this turbulent sect founded by Judas of Galilee. Mr. Solomon boldly surmises that this was so,<sup>5</sup> and that the Jesus of the gospels was a mixture of Judas with the Jesus of whom Josephus tells as crying "woe, woe to Jerusalem."

As Christianity spread in the Roman empire, it was necessary to carefully distinguish its founder from the Judas who led an insurrection and was put to death. Judas became the antagonist of Jesus, though Irenæus, the first Father who mentions the four gospels, also mentions a Gospel according to Judas, and we know that an early Christian sect, called by their adversaries the Cainites, venerated him.

Now for the anecdote. A red-haired Freethinker once overheard a Jesuit remark, "Let me see. Is not Judas always depicted with red hair?" "That, sir," remarked the fiery-hued Freethinker, "has no warrant in your Gospels. But it is quite clear that Judas was of the company of Jesus."

(Reprinted) J. M. WHEELER

## In Face of all Reason

[It will interest readers of this article to know that the author is not yet eighteen years of age. It is his first appearance in these columns, and we hope it will not be the last.]

ONE of the most pitiful aspects of the enslavement of the mass of humanity by religious fears and obsessions is the dutiful "kow-towing" to prevalent "beliefs" which is diligently performed by those whom one would suppose to be society's more intelligent members. These people betray their knowledge (and the convictions which must have sprung up in the course of gaining that knowledge) presumably in order to maintain positions, incomes and the respect in which they are held by the gaping, doped mass.

<sup>3</sup> Article "First Born." The offering was made when the child was thirty days old.

<sup>4</sup> Homily on Luke xxv.

<sup>5</sup> In a paper on "Josephus and the Gospels," contributed to *Progress*, November, 1887, I have given reasons supporting this view.

<sup>1</sup> "The son of perdition," John xvii., 12, is also referred to as Judas.

<sup>2</sup> It is noticeable that in the *Jewish Life of Christ* Judas has a prominent place, being indeed the hero of the piece.

Lenin called them "diploma-ed lackeys of clericalism," and that rather clumsy vehement contempt is merited by these academic persisters in the face of all reason.

In this article I propose to deal with the first example I encountered in my religious reading, of the pious professor. The story had better be told from the beginning.

A short while ago I became a member of the N.S.S., after traversing a materialist path, which commenced with the discovery of a Bible contradiction at the age of six. I am not terribly proud of that, for it has been truly said that children could point out the inconsistencies of the Book of Books: I just happened to be one of the children who did.

To continue: I decided to investigate the course which the religions of mankind have taken from the earliest known times to the present day, and then consider the situation, armed with the results of my investigation, paying special attention to the facts of deriviation.

*The Religions of Mankind*, by Professor Edmund Davison Soper, Professor in the History of Religions at the North-Western University, published in 1921, seemed to be the sort of thing I needed: so I invested in a second-hand copy.

Now, Professor Soper's book is useful: there are many facts contained in it which are worth remembering concerning the very material bases of so-called "divine" revelation; rituals, sects, and conferences of religious bodies are all dealt with. All this, however, one expects, unless the author is like the Rev. Casaubon, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, who in his life-work, *The Key to all Mythologies*, contended that there was an original divine revelation from which all subsequent mythologies are but distorted deriviations, with Christianity standing highest and most "divine."

Professor Soper turns out to be almost as naïve nevertheless. His method is as follows: he gives a concise, erudite sketch of the religion being discussed: then comes a summary of its present-day failings, and each chapter concludes with the refrain: "All for Jesus!" dressed up in terms of pious concern for the spiritual state of the world's inhabitants.

There is no need to point out that the book as a whole is wishy-washy and packed with contradictions. The first reaction of the reader is an anguished gasp: then, steeling himself, he takes a notebook and goes through the volume again.

At least that is what I did.

Let us follow the Professor on his not very consistent journey through this maze of world-wide self-deception and convention.

"Only through many years," he writes on p. 18, in the introductory essay on the *Nature of Religion*, "only through many years have students been able to disengage religion from other elements of culture and determine more exactly its distinctive nature."

And what is this "distinctive nature" "disengaged from other elements of culture," determined "only through many years"? We are informed on p. 21:—

Religion is coming more and more to be recognized as all-embracing, as functioning in every department of human life, as involving the intellect, the emotions and the will if it is normal and true of type.

More definitely:—

... the stages in religious growth are co-ordinate with the stages of civilization and culture. Religious development cannot be understood apart from that of culture in general. The steps of the cultural movement are the steps in the development of religion.

(p. 40).

So we are back where we started after "many

years" of "disengaging." But we always go back; that is the very essence of religion. "Go back as far as history extends," he proclaims, "and man is religious." One might reply with some show of civilized dignity that man wears trousers now.

Trousers had an origin no doubt and so had religion. Let us quote the Professor on this aspect:—

Fear has played a large part in religion and continues to do so, even among those whose religion should have "cast out fear," but to make fear responsible for religion is only a part of the story. (p. 29).

Yet, dealing with the earliest form of religion in his chapter on animism he says:—

He [the savage] is in fear of the spirits who can do him injury: he must placate them by offerings and make request of them by prayer; and we call this religion. (p. 76).

That, surely was the beginning: fear was responsible for religion by Professor Soper's own analysis!

The author seems to be unfortunate in his remarks on origin. He asks innocently:—

Why should death any more than some of the manifestations of power and activity evident on all sides be made the sole explanation of the origin of religion? (p. 33)

One can only repeat in utter astonishment: WHY! Because of *fear* of the unknown, Professor Soper!

But there is a treat in store: Professor Soper's own "sufficient explanation of origin":—

Man has a bent in the direction of religion which only needs the proper stimulus to become religion in one of its many recognizable forms. Here, then, in principle, is what we propose as a sufficient explanation of religion, that is, as far as this origin can be explained at all. (p. 35).

One might interject at this point, in the manner of the heckler: "What about the unrecognizable forms? Lunacy? William Blake? Marx? Hitler?" The Professor can tell "recognizable" forms and looks forward eagerly because "we may at any moment come into the presence of a gifted seer who surprises us by his intuitions and fills us with new confidence in man and the religious life he has developed." (p. 39). Will the Professor guarantee to recognize this "gifted seer"? May he not have already arrived in the person of Judge Rutherford, Father Divine or Sigmund Freud—when the Professor wasn't looking?

There is an unpleasant unctuousness on p. 62, when the author, dealing with animistic religion, deplores:—

The presence of the belief [in a "hazy" Creative Father] does not seem to raise their thoughts, nor to prevent them from a thousand practices which are utterly out of keeping with such a lofty conception.

We in this twentieth century have the monotheistic conception, this "lofty" conception in its most highly developed form (or so we are told); the "belief" makes itself felt at baptism and during the first day at school. Just take a look round, Professor, and catalogue *our* thousand practices utterly out of keeping, etc., etc.

SIMON FORD

(To be concluded)

To be capable of steady friendship or lasting love, are the two greatest proofs, not only of goodness of heart, but of strength of mind.—*Hazlitt*

The hope in the bosom of a man whose fixed star is humanity becomes a part of his blood, and is extinguished when his blood flows no more.—*George Meredith*

## Correspondence

## "OLD FITZ"

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—Mimmermus, in his interesting article on Fitzgerald, has dissipated the oft-repeated myth about Quaritch's "twopenny box." In 1908 the gentleman who writes on such subjects for the *Daily Telegraph* quoted the younger Quaritch as saying: "The rest [copies of the *Rubaiyat*] went into the twopenny box, and we have been buying them back ever since."

Again, in 1910, the same correspondent told how Fitzgerald: "strolled into Quaritch's shop, and, in high dudgeon, dumped down a couple of hundred copies of his *Omar Khayyam*, telling the publisher to do what he liked with them; they went into the twopenny box." In 1911 he returns to the subject and tells the story of a jewelled "Omar," which was lost in the Titanic, the binding of this original copy was encrusted with rubies, turquoises, topazes, amethysts, and other precious stones set in gold; the "twopenny box" is again mentioned. The last reference to the box that I can find is dated 1939; but its designation is changed, in this it is Swinburne who appears as: "ferreting about, like a good questing bookman, in Quaritch's *fourpenny* box." I believe that the highest price given for a copy of the *Rubaiyat* in the original buff wrappers was £890.

As a vegetarian admirer of Fitzgerald's verse I like to recall the following lines, from the dedication in "Thirsias," where Tennyson indicates very charmingly his appreciations of his old friend's humanitarian attributes:—

Old Fitz, who from your suburb grange,  
Where once I tarried for a while,  
Glance at the wheeling Orb of change,  
And greet it with a kindly smile;  
Whom yet I see as there you sit  
Beneath your sheltering garden-tree,  
And watch your doves about you flit,  
And plant on shoulder, hand and knee,  
Or on your head their rosy feet,  
As if they knew your diet spares  
Whatever moved in that full sheet  
Let down to Peter on his prayers.

As the "guiltless feasts" at a vegetarian Olympus "Old Fitz" is no doubt accorded a prominent place.

EDGAR SYERS

## ROBESPIERRE AND GOD

SIR,—The saying "If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him," was used by Robespierre in a speech attacking Atheism at the Jacobin Club in Brumaire, Year 2 (November, 1793). In the course of the speech he denounced Atheism as aristocratic (at that date the epithet most likely to rouse hostility and hatred for Atheists) and said that the idea of a Supreme being was altogether popular, and then used the words quoted above, no doubt "in inverted commas," understood as such by his audience.

In a later speech to the National Convention in Floreal, year 2 (May, 1794), he used the following words which are a rather remarkable early exposition of Pragmatism, and which should have delighted Professor W. James. I quote from *Orators of the French Revolution*, by H. Morse Stephens. "Je ne conçois pas du moins comment la nature aurait pu suggérer à l'homme des fictions plus utiles que toutes les réalités, et si l'existence de Dieu, si l'immortalité de l'âme n'étaient que des songes, elles seraient encore la plus belle de toutes les conceptions de l'esprit humain. . . ; aux yeux du législateur tout ce qui est utile au monde et bon de la pratique est la vérité." (I cannot in the least understand how Nature could suggest to man fictions more useful than all the realities; and if the existence of God, if the immortality of the soul were no more than dreams, they would still be the most beautiful of all the conceptions of the human mind. . . . In the eyes of the legislator, everything which is useful to the world and good in practice is the truth.")

A. W. DAVIS

## THE B.B.C. AND FREETHOUGHT

SIR,—I was much interested by the article in your January 28 issue on "Freethought and the B.B.C.," and also by a note on p. 57 in which you commented favourably on a letter of mine dealing with the same subject in the *Walthamstow Guardian*. You say: "Mr. Poynter hopes that this will lead to the B.B.C. adopting a fairer policy with regard to Freethought. We also would hope so, but we know the B.B.C., and have our doubts."

My own approach to the matter is simply that of justice and fair play. The B.B.C. is the broadcasting medium of a nation in which (at any rate legally) all sects and schools of thought are free. That being so, it is illogical as well as unfair for any school of thought to be banned from the radio.

Of course, theory is one thing, and practice is another. We English are not noted for logic. We do, however (whether rightly or wrongly), claim to love fair play; so I am inclined to think that steady persistence in demanding it may eventually succeed.

I may say I wrote to the secretary of a well-known Evangelical Protestant Society, who had protested to the B.B.C. against what he regarded as excessive aerial favours to the Roman Catholic Church, and I asked him if he would support fair opportunities for Rationalists. His reply was: "I confess I had not noticed your special point, but I have no doubt that if you represent it properly to the B.B.C. authorities it would have consideration." The editor of a well-known Evangelical Protestant weekly also wrote to me: "Our nation, having definitely adopted the Protestant Faith as a national religion, has a special obligation to see that the B.B.C. does not allow the Church of Rome such frequent opportunities of asserting her own claims. Allowing this argument (which I think is a strong one), one can at the same time recognize the claims of all minorities to a due hearing, though I should be sorry to find the B.B.C. degenerate into a sort of Hyde Park propaganda platform."

These views do not, I admit, show any enthusiasm; but it was hardly to be expected they would. They do indicate, however, a degree of perception of the legitimacy of the claim. The more that claim is pressed (tactfully), the sooner it will be met.

J. W. POYNTER

## THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE U.S.S.R.

SIR,—Mr. Archibald Robertson accuses me of quoting no data about Russia more recent than 1933. That is not quite true, but if it were, what then? In 1933 the Soviet regime was sixteen years old, and troops of people who visited Russia every year were at that period proclaiming the wonderful achievements of Soviet Russia. Bernard Shaw, Julian Huxley, J. B. S. Haldane, and many men equally well known, visited Russia before 1933, and came back with wonderful accounts.

To test the value of utterances down to 1933, we have merely to read the statements contained in Mr. Robertson's own book, *Philosophers on Holiday*, which was published in 1933. It describes his visit to Russia. On page 110 he makes one of his characters say:

"I admit the external squalour and mess. The quay at Leningrad when we first landed, with those down-and-out looking men and boys standing about gave me the pip, I can tell you. I've seen some in Moscow too, though not many."

On page 116 Mr. Robertson describes the condition of an English working man who had gone to Russia to work. Here is his account:—

"You'd hardly call him a 'have,' if you'd seen his flat. It's right out on the very outskirts of Moscow in one of the new blocks they're running up to cope with the housing shortage; and it consists of one bare bed-sitting-room for himself and his wife and child. No furniture but a table and two chairs—one broken. No pictures but a portrait of Stalin. They share a kitchen with the other people in the tenement."

Of the wife of the above unfortunate individual Mr. Robertson says: "She works in a factory too, so you can guess there's not too much home life."

Such was the condition of two able-bodied persons in Moscow in 1933, who both worked and had only one child to support. After that I need hardly further discuss the achievements of Soviet Russia during the first sixteen years.

Trotsky's book was published in 1937, but Mr. Robertson says:—

"To cite Trotsky as an authority is ridiculous."

I differ entirely. Trotsky's book is full of extracts from Russian papers, and quotations from Soviet statesmen. It would be disastrous for Trotsky to misquote, as his reputation would be ruined at once. If his quotations are accurate, then he has proved his point that in 1937 the mass of the Russian people were still on a diet of rye bread and potatoes.

Sir Walter Citrine cannot speak Russian, but he has a good knowledge of German, which many people in Russia can speak. On page 388 of his book, *I Search for Truth in Russia*, he says:—

"On November 8, 1937, it was reported that a minimum wage for industrial workers, which was abolished in the early stages of the Five Year Plan, had been reintroduced. This monthly minimum wage was fixed at the extraordinarily low figure of 110 roubles for whole-time adult piece workers, and 115 roubles for time workers."

"As far as I can measure its value to-day by its purchasing power, the rouble is now worth about 3d.," says Sir Walter. About the same date Trotsky and André Gide placed a similar value on the rouble in French francs. If all these people were correct, the minimum wage established in Russia in 1937, would be equivalent in purchasing power to £17 a year in England, provided one worked the whole year round. Evidently the conditions in 1937 were no better than those which Mr. Robertson witnessed in 1933.

"Have not great improvements been made since 1937?" asks H. S. I really do not know. However, after hearing marvellous stories for twenty years which turned out to be entirely without foundation, I have become very sceptical as to whether anything miraculous has happened in the last two years. I am a hopeless unbeliever in both Moscow and Lourdes.

R. B. KERR

SIR,—In my opinion, Mr. R. B. Kerr uses out-of-date Russian figures. Looking at last year's, we see that the average grain harvest for the five-year period prior to the 1914 war amounted to not much more than 4,000 million poods; in 1937 7,300 million poods were harvested. Last summer an article in the *News-Chronicle* stated that wheat supplies were so good that a weekly allowance of free bread was contemplated. Statistician Nemchinov estimates that prior to 1914 only 26 per cent of the harvested grain was marketed compared with 40 per cent now.

There have in some cases been enormous improvements since the 1930 statement quoted by Mr. Kerr. For instance, the Uzbek production of cotton has risen from 7,380,000 centners in 1934 to 15,042,000 in 1938, with the yield per hectare (?) rising in the same period from 7.9 to 16.4. The Uzbek Republic produces just over 50 per cent of the total Russian cotton crop. The entire cotton harvest rose from 12 millions centners in 1934 to 24 million in 1936, and by 1942 a production of 33 million is planned.

It is admitted that livestock farming has been the most backward branch of agriculture, but here again considerable progress has been made in recent years. The cattle population has risen from 38 millions in 1933 to 63 millions in 1938 sheep and goats from 50 to 103, and pigs from 12 to 31. During the next three or four years they plan to double the present sheep and goat population, and to raise the cattle figure by 40 per cent. Stalin and other realists, however, have taken much trouble to point out where Russia is lagging. In March, 1939, after commenting on the rapid rate of growth of Russian industry, Stalin spent much time in explaining how they were lagging behind other countries in pig-iron, steel and electricity production.

C. A. MORRISON

## Obituary

ALFRED WILLIAM CHARLES HARTGILL

WITH sorrow we announce the death of Alfred William Charles Hartgill, son of Mr. and Mrs. Hartgill, of Drayton Park, London, N. Quiet and unassuming in character he was always at home with his own thoughts, framing his opinions and holding them with determination. Although not a member of the N.S.S., he was a reader of the *Freethinker*, and in sympathy with the Freethought movement. Mr. Hartgill, senr., knew many of the members of the Kingsland Branch N.S.S., and is an admirer of Mr. Chapman Cohen. The death of Alfred William at the early age of 37 has dealt a great blow to the family, and it was a sad little group present at East Finchley Cemetery on Saturday, February 24, when the remains were interred and a Secular Service was read.

R.H.R.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4 by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

### LONDON

#### OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30, Mr. I. L. Lewis

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12 noon until 6 p.m. Various Speakers.

#### INDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Cricketers' Arms, Inverness Street, near Camden Town Underground Station): 7.30, Ben Bradley, "The Colonies and the War."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH (107 Helix Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.2, near Water Lane): 7.30, Annual General Meeting—Members only.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, C. E. M. Joad, M.A., D.Lit.—"God and the State of the World."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Lamb and Flag, James Street, Oxford Street, opposite Bond Street Station): 7.0, Mr. R. B. Kerr—"Russia's Economic Failure."

### COUNTRY

#### OUTDOOR

MANCHESTER BRANCH (Stevenson Square): 3.0, Mr. W. A. Atkinson, Literature on sale.

#### INDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (WIRRAL) BRANCH, N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane): 7.0, Miss A. Parry—"Woman and Freethought."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. N. Charlton—"Did Jesus Christ Exist?" Questions and Discussion.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "Secularism and its New Psychology."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, corner of Islington): 7.0, A Lecture.

PORTSMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Conservative Club, 326 Fratton Road): 3.0, A. W. Scott—"Ration Cards Instead of Books."

TEES-SIDE BRANCH N.S.S. (Jubilee Hall, Leeds Street, Stockton-on-Tees): 6.30, Debate—"That the Defence of the U.S.S.R. necessitated the Invasion of Finland." Affir: Mr. H. Guthrie. Neg. Mr. H. Dalkin.

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