

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

VOL. LX.—No. 45

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1940

PRICE THREEPENCE

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Parsons for the People—The Editor</i> - - - -	685
<i>The Tyranny of Theology—Mimnermus</i> - - - -	686
<i>Einstein on Religious Superstition—Frank Hill</i> - - - -	688
<i>A Ghost of a God—H. Preece</i> - - - -	692
<i>Some Reflections of Islam—H. Cutner</i> - - - -	693
<i>Heresies and Heretics—R. G. Ingersoll</i> - - - -	694

Views and Opinions

Parsons for the People

"Pastors for the populace" is the attractive heading of a recent editorial in the *Church Times*. Judging the situation as it stands it looks as though the real problem is to find a populace for the pastors. There are certainly more than enough parsons to go round. Indeed, quite recently a member of the parsonate actually suggested that if parsons were rationed, and the existing congregations pooled, a suitably sized congregation could be found for every parson, and there would then be a number over who could be used in the armed forces. Certainly we have never heard of demonstrations with men carrying banners "we want more parsons." There has never been a conference of the "populace" to increase the number of parsons. It is not even suggested that the Government should, as a war-time measure, increase the number of clergymen. It is true we have Lord Halifax, who may be described as a semi-parson disguised as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and ex-Sir Thomas Inskip, masquerading as Lord Caldecote, both of whom impress upon the public the need for more prayers; but speaking generally, the only people who are impressed with the need for increasing the number of parsons are the parsons themselves. They thus offer the curious spectacle that the smaller the demand the greater the need for increasing the supply. It looks as though the *Church Times* had turned things upside down. The problem is not to find parsons for the "populace," the real difficulty is to find a populace for the parsons.

I think, however, that this sentence of the *Church Times* is worth a little consideration. I remember that some years ago the ex-Bishop of London (Winnington Ingram) who had a great capacity for unconsciously letting the cat out of the bag, said when addressing a select West-end gathering, and asking for subscriptions for an East-end mission, that were it not for the Churches the people in the West-end would not have so comfortable a time as they were having. That was a very honest expression, even though it was not intentionally so. For it may be noted that the home missionary movement goes from West to East. And that, too, has its significance, "Populace" is defined by responsible dictionaries as "the common people," "the multitude," "the masses." So the *Church Times* was not thinking of the "upper" or even the "middle" class. There is much virtue in a word.

But I resent this expression of the *Church Times*, because it casts an undeserved slight on the middle and upper classes of society. I maintain that there is just as much intelligence in the higher reaches of society as there is in the lower one, and therefore there is as much of its concomitant—heresy. Whitechapel has

not more intelligence than Mayfair. Criticism of religion is rife among all classes of society—so also is stupidity. It is strange that there should be so great a desire to see that the "populace" get religion, while giving a comparative freedom to other social classes to go to hell in their own fashion. It may also be observed that there is far more serious opposition to Freethinking publications that are published at sixpence than those published at half-a-guinea or a guinea.

* * *

Real Christianity

The *Church Times* article was written apropos of the death of the Rev. Patrick McCormick, who was praised for the nature of his services, his fine human nature, and his sympathy with the poor. On this head I can say nothing, for I know very little about him. But I am prepared to believe that he was all the writer of the article says he was. I am also ready to believe that such a man will attract a large congregation, that many who would not otherwise go to Church will attend a good musical service, or join in a sing-song, with the parson acting as "compere," and will come away feeling that they have had a good time. And if the parson is able to give help to the poor they too will gather at his Church and sing his praises. I am not caricaturing religious ceremonies when I say these things because one will find in religious journals much praise of certain Churches because they present the features described.

But I insist that none of these things are essential to Christianity, and the *Church Times* has often emphasized the fact that Christianity without certain specific doctrines is not Christianity at all. There is a very definite set of doctrines without belief in which no one has the right to call himself a Christian. One must believe in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, who was an incarnation of God; in the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and that he awaits his followers in a heaven that was wiped out of existence over three hundred years ago by the establishment of the Copernican system of astronomy. Nothing else matters. Feeding the hungry section of the "populace," free concerts, pleasant sing-songs, etc., have no logical, no necessary connexion with Christian doctrines. Their truth or falsity remains untouched. Of course, many Christians have been kind to those in trouble, many Christians are kindly in their disposition and attractive in their personalities, but all this applies to non-Christians and anti-Christians. Even "when the enterprising burglar isn't burgling" he has a taste for basking in the sunshine, and when the "coster isn't jumping on his mother," he is also susceptible to all sorts of æsthetic pleasures. Human nature would not be what it is were things otherwise. But to parade these common elements of human nature as evidence of the truth of Christian doctrines is sheer humbuggery. This is one of those lies that have been told for so long and so often that many Christians have actually come to believe from sheer force of repetition, and keep on till their own lies deceive 'em, and oft repeating at length believe 'em.

* * *

The People and Religion

This tale of Christian propagandists has been told so very frequently during the past fifty or sixty years,

that a great many—even many non-Christians—have come to believe there is something in it. As a matter of fact the loudly-expressed interest of Christian preachers in social progress is a very late development; but the scientific and social developments of the past century and a half have been so rapid, and there are so few who are acquainted with these developments, that it has been quite easy for this modern Christian fable to establish itself. One need not wonder overmuch that the Christian legend grew so rapidly in the early centuries when we realize that this interest in organized social life is very, very modern. Gibbon's jibe with reference to the early generations of Christians that it was not in this world that they looked forward to being either happy or useful, was very largely true of Christians in general until little more than a century ago.

But those who are really acquainted with historic developments, and who do not permit themselves to rely for their history upon novels and specially prepared summaries will remember that for many centuries not only was every form of social injustice backed up by the Christian Church, so long as the Church received support in return, but that the worst features of our modern industrial system were developed while the Christian Church was in power; and by the "Church" I include both the Established Church and the Nonconformist bodies.

There is no need to dwell on the horrors of the factory system—children of seven years of age working twelve and fourteen hours per day in insanitary workshops, orphan children sold, literally by cart-loads, into what was virtually slavery, women half-naked hauling trucks of coal underground, etc., with every attempt at reform either resisted by religious organizations, or with them standing coldly aloof. For sheer brutality nothing has ever exceeded the early British factory system—until the fundamentally religious Hitlerism of to-day was established. Readers of the half-dozen carefully documented volumes by the Hammonds on the life of the working-classes of this country from 1760 to 1850 will not need more than a reminder on this head.

What is worth noting is that side by side with the development of the worst phases of the factory system, the injustices of the attempts to crush every attempt at Trade Unionism, by the infamous combination laws, the denial of the people to a reasonable political franchise, the attempts to suppress freedom of speech and publication, there went on a great Christian revival. Consider the following facts. First of all there was the great Wesleyan revival. When Wesley died in 1791 the Methodists numbered 72,000. Fifty years later they had grown to two millions. But their influence on social reform and radical movements was either negligible or hostile. Often we read that many of the popular reform leaders were reared in Nonconformist circles. It is equally true that many of them were reared in Church circles, but both Church and Chapel stood aloof, and their members were often positively forbidden to take part in reform movements. So late as the time of the Chartists, members belonging to the Chartist movement were expelled from many of the Methodist Churches, or "reproved" for their conduct. And when one of the vilest characters that ever sat upon a throne—George IV.—became King, a document that would have been objectionable if it referred to an ideal monarch was presented to him by the Methodists.

With regard to the Established Church, one meets with what one might expect from a Church that has always been the servant of authority. It fought for its own power and position. The Church was not deficient in men of ability—that picture has been very much overdrawn. So also has the poor pay of some of the clergy. The pay of large numbers of them was very great. York and Canterbury took each about

twenty-five thousand yearly, and out of 12,000 incumbencies in 1778, 6,000 were absentees employing curates to do their work for thirty or fifty pounds a year. The concern of the clergy was mainly for promotion and for larger incomes. If evidence be required, one may find it unconsciously given in the fact, noted by the Hammonds, that the newspapers and other publications favoured by working men devoted much of their space to attacks on the clergy. That had been the feature of reform agitations for centuries—attacks on the clergy, complaints of their greed, and their opposition to reform.

Consider the significance of the following facts. The London Missionary Society was formed in 1800, the Religious Tract Society in 1799, Church Missionary Society 1796, Christian Knowledge Society, 1804, Mission to the Jews, 1808. There were many others that have not survived. Between 1801 and 1831 over 500 new Churches were built. In 1813 Parliament voted one million for building new churches, and another half million in 1824. The country witnessed a perfect cascade of religious effort Established and Nonconformist. Whatever the people went short of there was no shortage of religion. But there was a "populace" that was badly clad, badly housed, badly educated, underfed and overworked. But their souls were looked after, and their ears filled with the evils of unbelief.

It is idle to meet these statements by pointing out that many Christians exhibited sympathy and gave help to those who were fighting for reform. Of course these existed. Otherwise nothing could have been accomplished. There could be no revolution anywhere or at any time unless a number of the privileged classes took up the cause of those who were fighting for improvement. The agitation for reform has generally begun with a revolt in which those who benefited from the existing situation played a part. The scientific case against Christianity is not they who profess it are necessarily bad, but that Christianity supplies them with false standards of value, and only too often provides excuses for many forms of rascality.

So my study of Christian history has taught me not to feel surprised that so pious a journal as the *Church Times* should take it as a religious need to find amiable pastors for the "populace." It is only by that method that the populace can be kept content with conditions that ought long since to have disappeared.

CHAPMAN COHEN

The Tyranny of Theology

'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we part,
More life, and fuller, that we want.

Tennyson.

It is noteworthy that one family should have produced two such eminent poets as Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Christina shared with her famous brother the delight in medieval colouring and subject, and in the sensuous appeal of verse, but unlike Dante Gabriel, she had a strong strain of superstition in her nature, and she soon lost her vision of a brightly-hued and romantic world, and turned her tired eyes to the contemplation of morbid religious subjects.

At the beginning of her career, Christina Rossetti's poetry exhibited a definite personality. It is, perhaps, her sex which renders her lyrics more bird-like and spontaneous than her brother's verses. It can be nothing but her constant experience of ill-health which made her dwell so constantly on the morbid side of religion.

Death, which to Shelley and Swinburne, and a

whole host of poets, seemed own brother to sleep, was to her a more horrific shape, and was a perennial subject for her muse. The constant burden of her verse was the mutability of human affairs, not with the light touch of Horace or Herrick, but with more of a suggestion of the poetasters of the hymn-books. And when to physical ailments were added love disappointments, entirely caused by religious bigotry, there is small difficulty in understanding how Christina Rossetti became a devotional poet; and one of such distinction that, at her best, Crashaw, Bonner, Vaughan, and Francis Thompson can be held her contemporaries. And the saintly Dr. Donne, be it remembered, mitigated his raptures concerning the Blessed Saviour by writing poems on such less sacred and more welcome subjects as seeing his mistress getting into bed.

So many of Christina Rossetti's poems are very short, and are concerned with twenty-second hand theological subjects. In nothing is her undoubted power so much shown as in the bare fact that so few are commonplace. Had she not possessed real genius, they might have sunk to the dead level of religious verse, orthodox in purpose, and commonplace in execution. The only trait she had in common with the ordinary hymn-writers is a certain morbidity in dwelling on the purely pathological side of theology. She disembowelled the Christian Scriptures in search of phrases, and her brother, William, said, with justice, that if "all those passages which were directly or indirectly dependent upon what can be found in the Bible" had been taken out of Christina's verses, they "would have been reduced to something approaching a vacuum."

Starting her literary career as the one woman member of the Pre-Raphaelite art enthusiasts, she, naturally, showed the effect of the romantic spirit in her first mature poem, "Goblin Market," and in the less fanciful "Prince's Progress," both of which have all the rich glow and gorgeous tints of Dante Gabriel's, and William Morris's works, both in art and literature. The meditative and introspective sonnets of even her later years have something in common with this early artistic impulse. But what a change was there! It is impossible not to deplore the narrowing down and petrifying of Christina Rossetti's poetic interest. Here was a woman of warm blood and passionate sense of beauty, who, with better health and satisfied human affections, might have interpreted worthily the joy of life. Instead, she turned with ever-increasing morbid pleasure to the contemplation of the sickly delights of a barren religiosity. She was a paradox, an anomaly, a Puritan among Catholics, a nun outside the convent walls of the Romish Church. Necessarily preoccupied, as she was, with attenuated religious emotions, her melodies with difficulty escape monotony. And yet, again and again, Nature will out, and the old, half-forgotten, buried romantic instinct asserts itself. The truth is, in the last analysis of all, she was not a sacred, but a secular poet. Her religious bias forced her sympathies into wrong channels. To the real world she became indifferent. With actual life, its questionings, its humours, its perplexities, its despairs, hopes, loves, there is no sympathy in her poetry. Beyond the quiet walls of her sheltered residence her tired eyes saw but a frenzied world rushing headlong to perdition. Her idea of wisdom is to withdraw into an inner shrine of pious meditation, disturbed only by feminine anxiety for the fate of her particular Church of Christ.

Her piety was essentially of the womanly, prayerful, submissive kind, so attractive to priests of all ages and all countries. It only kneels in adoring wonder, and gives money and service freely.

Christina knew next to nothing of the world. She might as well have lived in a ginger-beer bottle, and never looked over the edge. Yet her fancy picture of "the world" is grim and forbidding:—

Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy,
And subtle serpents gliding in her hair."

And she fears lest her feet "cloven too, take hold on hell." This wrong view of life blinds her eyes. When she notices the beauties of Nature, it is always through religious spectacles. She could not rise to the art of Coleridge's:—

Hidden brook,
In the leafy month of June
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Or to the magic of Meredith's':—

Hear the heart of wilderness beat
Like a centaur's hoof on sward.

Nor could she utter the brave defiance of her sister-poet, Emily Bronte:—

No coward soul is mine.

But she had a haunting music all her own:—

When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me,
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree;
Be the grass green above me,
With showers and dewdrops wet,
And, if thou wilt, remember,
And, if thou wilt, forget.

This poem, however, is a bright exception. Usually, her emotions were regulated and refined by ascetic priestly traditions, and this places her at a great disadvantage among singers of free utterance. At the worst, she is never crude, extravagant, or commonplace. She challenges comparison with the greatest of her sex. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is the inevitable foil of Christina Rossetti, and the two women suggest each other by the mere force of contrast. The author of "Sonnets from the Portuguese," "Casa Guidi Windows," and the pathetic "Cry of the Children" is the very antipodes of the spinster who gave us the shy, devotional "New Poems." There is none, of course, of Mrs. Browning's fluency and frenzy in Miss Rossetti's work, but the sister-poet lacks the splendid humanity of the other.

Christina Rossetti, despite her undoubted lyrical gifts, hardly stands the comparison. How should she? A delicate spinster, she held the Christian Superstition in the most absolute and most literal manner. Shadow, not light, was her nourishment, and her music was a delicate undertone. We long for something individual. Like the dying farm-labourer, we prefer something homely and concrete. His friends tried to solace him with fancy pictures of the joys of heaven. He raised himself for a last word. "'Tis all very well for thee, but give I a game of darts and a glass at the 'Pig and Whistle.'" His mortality, like that of so many of us, was unequal to raptures too severe. Christina Rossetti's life work is, in its way, an impeachment of Christian Orthodoxy. In spite of its beautiful language, it explains nothing, and adds nothing of value to human knowledge, but leaves the world in the meshes of old-world ignorance and superstition.

MIMNERMUS

The proverbial wisdom of the populace at gates, on roads, and in markets, instructs the attentive ear of him who studies Man more fully than a thousand rules ostentatiously arranged.
Lavater.

He who thinks he can find in himself the means of doing without others is much mistaken; but he who thinks that others cannot do without him is still more mistaken.

La Rochefoucauld

The Church and the Theatre

ALTHOUGH in its earlier history particularly, the Christian Church, within its own walls, enacted plays to depict the legends of its theology, it forbade under severe penalties and laws—as well as by threats of hell fire and the locking of Heaven's gates—all theatrical performances of a secular nature. Professor Lecky, the historian, says: "The doctrine of the Holy Church on the subject was clear and decisive. The Theatre was unequivocally condemned—all actors were pronounced to be in a state of mortal sin, and was therefore doomed if they died in their profession to eternal perdition. This frightful proposition was enunciated with the most emphatic clearness by countless bishops and theologians, and even embodied in the canon law and rituals."

The Ritual of Paris distinctly pronounced that "actors from their very employment were necessarily excommunicated." Sacraments were denied to those who refused to repudiate their profession, and their burial was "as the burial of a dog."

Among those who were refused a place in consecrated ground was the beautiful and gifted actress, Adrienne Le Couvreur, who was in her day the brightest ornament of the French stage. "She died refusing to slander the profession she had loved and adorned and was buried in a field for cattle on the banks of the Seine."

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Church manifested an intense bitterness towards the theatre, but despite the forbidding of the Catholic Church, the common folk continued to throng the playhouses.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the actors in a petition entreated the Pope to relieve them from the censures of the Canon Law, but their petition was rejected by Rome.

Actors were also deprived of the sacrament of marriage, and this drove men and women of the theatre to "love" unions bereft of the protection of the law and the Church, and their children were branded as bastards.

When the great French lawyer, Huerne de la Motte, in 1761, had the courage to denounce as scandalous the refusal of marriage to actors, his work was burnt by the public executioner, he was struck off the list of advocates, and he was prevented from following any longer his profession.

The first great musical composer of France, Lulli, could only obtain absolution by "burning his operatic compositions."

In Spain at the same period opera was forbidden by the Church, which through its "divine inspiration" proclaimed that opera was the "cause of pestilence and draught."

Lutherism and Calvinism took the same attitude against not only the theatre, but against entertainments generally.

A poet of the period wrote:—

If the Churches had their way, they would take
Youth from Life and the Spring from the year.

In my own youth, I travelled through more than 300 Scottish towns and villages, from the Shetland Isles to Kirkeudbright, with opera and other musical companies, and in some of the Northern and Highland districts we received a rough reception from the Calvinistic section of the people—frequently united religious services were held outside the little theatres and halls we played at—and with uncharitable vituperation we were labelled "sinners of iniquity," and were consigned to hell fire.

In some towns we were not allowed to show on Saturday, as "it was too near Sunday," and our

"singing girls disturbed the meditations of the godly"—what a subtle compliment!

But the enthusiasm of the followers of Bobbie Burns compensated for the bigotry of the Calvinists, and we did "good business."

A change has come over Scotland. Why! in Glasgow the cinemas are now open on a Sunday! (The Bailies salve their consciences by taking a percentage of receipts.) And to-day also Catholic priests are allowed to attend dramatic performances—outside their own particular dioceses.

Time Marches On! Freethought has gradually educated even the Christian Churches from many of their foolish bigotries. Look back—only a short time—through the pages of history.

The Churches condemned from their pulpits as sinful the eating of the common democratic potato, and when the kindly umbrella was invented in France it was damned by the clericals; for "did not the gentle rain fall from Heaven above, blessing him that gives and him that receives."

The iron plough was banned as "against the will of God"—the parsons stated it would "poison the soil."

The poor old God of Christianity has suffered much from the uncharity and ignorance of His professional agents! Perhaps the Prayer Telephone of "divine inspiration" they claimed, and still claim, was out of order?

Let Rationalists continue the work of educating the Christians! We are succeeding happily—they are even dropping their Bible Devil! He has become too hot for to-day's scientific outlook. We have refrigerated their Hell and have discounted their other oriental superstitions. Why, even in the Petticoat Lane of religion, the nostrums of the Theological Medicine Men are a drug on the market (and drug is a good word!)

Yes, Time Marches On! So does Freethought!

HENRY J. HAYWARD

New Zealand.

Einstein on Religious Superstition

"THERE is no higher religion than human service." This noble conception is the utterance of Professor Einstein, quoted by H. Gordon Garbedian in his comprehensive work, titled *Einstein*. Not in the conventional religious sense—but in the spirit thus indicated—Einstein believed himself to be a deeply religious man.

"I cannot," declared Einstein, "conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves. I cannot imagine a God whose purposes are modelled after our own—a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. That an individual should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension.

"Nor do I wish it otherwise.

"Such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls. Enough for me are the mystery of the eternity of life and the inkling of the marvellous structure of reality, together with the single-hearted endeavour for me to try humbly to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the intelligence manifested in Nature."

Garbedian proceeds, in his own words, to further expound Einstein's religious attitude.

"The child," he says, "nursing at the breast of its mother, the savage nomad gazing at the numberless stars, or the scientist studying bits of life under his powerful microscope—all may possess the religious sense. The human race has come to consciousness in its cosmic environment as a child comes to conscious-

ness in its nursery, and so far in its long history has developed three forms of religion in its quest of the unknown.

"Of these, explains Einstein, two were the most common, while the third form, although traces of it could be found even among the ancients, was still a rare emotional experience, which only exceptionally gifted individuals could attain.

"With primitive man, it was fear, above all the other varying emotions, that led to religion. This religion of fear—fear of hunger, of wild animals, of sickness and death—showed itself in deeds and sacrifices intended to obtain the protecting favour of an anthropomorphic divinity on whose will and actions these fearful happenings were believed to depend. Because primitive man's understanding of causal relations was poorly developed, this religion of fear created a tradition that was handed down from generation to generation by a special priestly caste that set itself up as a mediator between the people and the beings they feared.

"This hegemony gave power into the hands of a privileged class, which combined priestly functions with secular authority in order to make its rule more secure, or the political rulers and the priestly caste made common cause in their own interests.

"The second source of religion, added Einstein, consisted of the social impulses of human beings—the longing for guidance, love, and comfort by a Providence who protects, decides, rewards, and punishes. This was the social or moral concept of God; and fathers and mothers and the leaders of human communities, conscious of their mortality and fallibility, turned to Him as the source of inspiration and comfort in sorrow and unsatisfied longing, and as the preserver of the souls of the dead.

"Common to all these religions was the anthropomorphic character of their conception of God, and only a comparatively few individuals of exceptional endowments succeeded in getting beyond that level.

"Those who did, attained the third stage of religious experience, which Einstein called "cosmic religion." Those who experienced it worshipped goodness and beauty and truth. They did not believe human conduct should be motivated by fear of punishment or hope of reward. Cosmic religion called for a fellowship of mankind following the torch of human service; and its followers were ready to submerge self in the pursuit of an ideal—to spend themselves without measure, prodigally and ecstatically, for a great and noble goal."

Briefly, then, we have here the three gradations—firstly, the fear of primitive man; later, the present-day largely held belief in a preserver of the souls of the dead; and, finally, the cosmic religious sense—so transcendently illustrated in Einstein himself—which comes from "a contemplation of the endless beauty and the amazing harmony and order revealed in Nature," and which is "the strongest and noblest driving force behind the lives of men of superior intelligence."

Through Garbedian it is interesting to learn that, in his early years, Einstein—because of his deficiencies in foreign languages, geography, and history—was regarded by his instructors as of subnormal intelligence.

"Subnormal"—the man who, later, was to "revolutionize mankind's childlike conceptions of creation"!

Born in Germany and proud of his Jewish parentage, Einstein at the age of 21 was disappointed in seeking a position, and for the next six months he remained in the ranks of the unemployed—a poverty-stricken young man, tossed about on the waves of uncertainty and discouragement.

Einstein has been an ardent Socialist from his earliest years.

"He is happiest," he said, "who wants least from

anyone. I do not care for money, decorations, or titles. I do not crave praise. The thing I value above all else is the understanding and appreciation of my fellow-workers."

Music and tramping—walks in secluded places—are the only relaxations he has allowed himself. He is a virtuoso of the violin. The simplicity of his living is shown in the fact that he considers the soap that is good enough to wash with is good enough to use in shaving. Two kinds of soap are, to him, a needless complication of life.

"To him," says Garbedian, "wealth—and the claims of social superiority—were simply expressions of arrogance and conceit. To a man of his modest tastes and humane instincts any exhibition of wasteful luxury in a world in which so many of his fellow-men were suffering for want of bread was utterly distasteful. So it was no surprise to his friends that Einstein, when he received in 1921 the Nobel Prize for Physics, the highest honour in the power of international science to bestow, turned over the £10,000 in prize-money to charity without keeping a penny for himself."

Einstein's secretary—a young woman—was greatly harassed by men and women who wanted a "simple" explanation in a sentence or two of the vast complexities of the theory of relativity.

"What," she asked him, "shall I tell them is relativity?" "Tell them," he playfully replied, "that when a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour it seems to him only a minute; but, let him sit on a hot stove for only a minute, and it is longer than any hour! That's relativity."

FRANK HILL.

(To be concluded)

Acid Drops

The Bishop of St. Albans (*Herts Advertiser*, October 25) has discovered why the world is in a state of war, and also why we ought to thank God that this is so. First of all the war is due to an increase of Secularism. The last twenty-one years, he says, has seen "a marked increase of secularism . . . domestic, educational, industrial, and economic." All that means is that fewer people believe in the churches. The reason for selecting the last twenty-one years is that it covers the period between the last war and the present one, but it overlooks the fact that the last war, which led to this one, was brought about by a conflict of nations that had been Christian for many centuries. Somehow or the other, the Church has to be relieved of responsibility. Of course, we do not question that there has been a growth of disbelief in the churches, and we believe we have done something to bring that about.

The other contribution made by the Bishop, is that of explaining the way that God is helping us by permitting the war. We are undergoing what the Bishop calls a purge, and just as Campbell of the City Temple called the last war—which led to this one—"a day of God," so the Bishop of St. Alban's cries, "Let us thank God for this purge. We needed it, every one of us," and if we are properly appreciative of God sending the "purge," then we shall achieve "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." That helps considerably. When we sit o' nights wondering whether the German raider is dropping his bomb on our house or on the house of someone else, we must thank God that he has given us the chance of being properly purged, also that he is using Hitler and Mussolini (who must be his agents) to apply the purge and so achieve the peace that passes understanding. And when good Christians go to heaven they may expect to see Hitler and Mussolini fluttering round the throne, and introducing the said good Christians as samples of the purged ones. We hope that God will consider the catch worth the having. Perhaps he will—on the principle that "birds of a feather flock together." Really, we would prefer the other place for a permanent residence.

These are trying times, and we are urged to make extraordinary efforts to achieve success in the war. But our guides must not ask too much. Thus, Major-General Fuller, a very good Christian, who so strongly denounced an alliance with Russia, when that alliance might have prevented this war, now tells us (*Evening Standard*, October 30), that "We must glance behind us as we look our enemies in the face." We agree that the members of our armed forces are achieving wonders, but we must not ask too much from the willing horse. And are they equal to the task which General Fuller wishes to impose on them? Bunyan had a Mr. Facing Bothways, but he was a good staunch believer in old fashioned Christianity, and so was capable of anything.

The agitation over Einstein's criticism of religion is still proceeding in the United States, and criticisms are being made in other countries. Which shows that there is one thing that is largely international—religion. Trouble makes strange bedfellows, and to-day the intercourse between nations is such that a scientific attack on religion in one place has its effect on religion all over the world. And investigators belonging to many countries have all helped to the building of a scientific theory of religion. France, Italy, Germany, the United States and other countries have each made their contribution to the mass of anthropological knowledge that has taught us what religion means, how it began and how it must eventually die as a form of belief among civilized and cultured peoples. And as a consequence the internationalism of the religious world has become very real. Each sect in the countries named, large or small, have come to feel that they must hang together if they are not to hang separately.

The President of the Jewish Theological Seminary in which Einstein delivered his address cautioned Einstein, "he should realize that he must speak with as much reserve as he habitually does in his own field of natural science." That, we suppose, means that he ought to adopt the policy of so many timid or time-serving people, and be content with saying, "I am not equipped to give any opinion on the subject of religion," or play the old game of sitting on the fence, sorrowing that one has had to give up early religious beliefs. The *Tablet* cites a well known religionist, Maritain, to the effect that Einstein's "essential error is the one of confusing phenomena with that which is true of all science and of all knowledge." And that, to be quite blunt, without troubling to be stupidly polite, is just clotted nonsense, whether it be the sentiments of a man of learning or of the village clown.

To Maritain there only needs pointing out that "phenomena" covers everything, the field of feeling, reflection, material, or anything else, even that which is called "spiritual." All these varied phenomena are different "experiences," and the task of science is to marshal and classify them in terms of likeness and differences. Later, philosophy does for the groups what science has already done for particulars. The rest is nothing, and we readily grant Professor Maritain that this is the field of religion.

As to the other criticism of Einstein, that too is a common form of nonsense. It is assumed that Einstein was expressing a mere opinion in telling the religious world that for the honest and the understanding mind, the game was up. There is nothing to be reserved about. Einstein knows, as everyone may know who cares to acquaint himself with the facts, that the question of the existence of gods and ghosts and angels and devils is no longer a matter of mystery. They stand upon the same level as many other blunders and illusions.

In the face of the huge army of priests and semi-priests, fakirs and fools, who are quite ignorant of what science actually knows of the origin and development of religion, asking a scientist to speak with "reserve" where religion is concerned is equal to asking him to put forward the fact of gravitation with reserve. The need to-day is for those who know to speak outright; to use the language of Kingdon Clifford to shout the truth from the

housetops. If all did that we should see many more impostures than religious ones totter to the ground. But so long as the religious imposture stands, many other impostures will remain strong.

There is a curious, but not uncommon type of parson, existing in Bradford, Yorks., in the person of the Rev. Leslie Arnold. He writes from the Vicarage to the *Bradford Argus* (August 19), an account of the, to him, shocking state of mind displayed in a conversation by a couple of Council Schoolboys, overheard by himself while he was "snooping" round listening to talk that was not intended for his ears. Here is what he heard one boy saying to another. "God never gave the ten commandments, did he, John? Our teacher says there was no such man as Moses, and something about their being lots of other codes in Egypt or somewhere" Mr. Arnold is shocked at such statements as these being given to boys by their teachers, and rambles on about the increase in juvenile crime being one of the consequences of such teaching. The *Argus* is cruel enough to publish a portrait of Mr. Arnold, and all we can say of it is that the face depicted leaves one with an explanation of the sentiment expressed.

Now Mr. Arnold, unless he is unbelievably ignorant, must be aware that there is not a Christian writer with any pretence to learning who would not say that, in the Christian sense of the term, the ten commandments were not given to Moses by God, and who would deny that similar codes did not exist in Egypt, and many other places. We do not think that even Mr. Arnold can be ignorant of a truth that has been given to the world by many Christian publishers for at least two generations, and by others over a much longer period. Why should not boys be old enough to report what has been taught them as the truth? Mr. Arnold's plan is evidently to rub into boys and girls all the stereotyped lies of a very old-fashioned Christian teaching, and then trust to their never finding out the truth. There are quite a number of contemptible ways of getting a living, but Mr. Arnold's method is one of the worst. He is not alone in this, but he is a very poor specimen of a very bad lot.

The Roman Catholic papers are still up in arms to get "full and adequate" arrangements made for evacuated children (why, in the name of decency are they not called "refugee" children?) to be brought under complete control of Roman Catholic priests—the costs, apparently, to be paid by the country. Why can they not show enough confidence in their religion to let the children alone in such circumstances, and place security before creed? But the Catholic priesthood is a very good illustration of all priesthoods. Nothing counts but the maintenance of their own power, and a Catholic child bombed is a less unpleasant sight than the same living in security, but open to the "poison," not of Atheism, but of Protestantism. Perhaps, one day the general public will awaken to the significance of these manoeuvres. Meanwhile the Pope's friend, Mussolini, is making the "evacuation" of children more urgent.

"Religion," says the Archbishop of York, "must be the governing force in life." Religion, it hardly needs emphasizing, is the business in which the Archbishop is engaged. But with a change of words that seems Hitler's opinion with regard to Nazism, and as with religion it justifies all sorts of injustices and absurdities. What it boils down to is that no organization of society will be agreeable to the Ancient Order of Medicine-Men that does not give them a very large measure of control.

There are some "canny folk" on the Scottish side of the border. The *People* (October 27), reports the complaint of the minister of one Church that he was getting "as many as 200 visiting cards, handed in by people who pretended to be present at the Communion service," when they were actually absent. Presumably these two hundred were reported to God as "all present." Is it possible that Church attendances are reported in a similar manner? We hope that the recording angel will in future check the figures carefully. By this time he ought to be sufficiently acquainted with the character of the majority of his followers to be on his guard.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- H. HUMPHREY (Glasgow).—We quite appreciate your solicitude for our safety, but what you suggest is quite impracticable. We are taking all the care that is possible.
- E. G. MACFARLANE.—As a soldier you sacrifice your freedom in the British Army, by not having the liberty to be absent from Church parade without special permission. But we believe that your superior officer has no power to compel you to enter the Church, or to take part in the service. Many officers are sufficiently liberal to do what they can to act fairly to Freethinking men in the forces. We do not know how a "Freethinking service" could be conducted, but there is nothing to prevent any soldier, sailor, airman talking Freethought to their comrades-in-arms, and if literature is required, that will be forwarded on application to this office.
- R. SMYTHE, and J. PEPPER.—Thanks for addresses; papers are being sent.
- J. B. MIDDLETON.—We are pleased to have so high an appreciation of our *Almost an Autobiography* from one who has read the *Freethinker* for so many years.
- A.T.H.—Received, but sorry we cannot use.
- I. M. BOWLES writes: "May one express admiration for the manner in which you are surmounting difficulties, and to assure you that as a result to date from this quarter at least three of us are endeavouring to emulate you and raise our standard where a standard never flew." That is the kind of appreciation we most desire.
- 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.
- 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.
- Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.
- 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. Roselli, giving as long notice as possible.
- Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Sugar Plums

Lord Winterton, M.P. for Horsham, complained in the House of Commons, of Mr. H. G. Wells using what he called "blackguardly language" during his recent visit to the United States. Lord Winterton said it was intolerable that "this Agnostic and Republican, with his hatred of things that nine-tenths of his fellow countrymen hold precious, should be allowed to go to the United States to lecture at the present time." We fancy that if Lord Winterton was Hitler, and Hitler was in power here, Mr. Wells would not be allowed to speak anywhere at any time. Lord Winterton was not blackguardly; he was simply exhibiting his bad taste, ill-breeding, and shallow mentality.

The special crime committed by Mr. Wells is that he referred to Lord Gort as "a praying general." That is what Winterton had in mind when he referred to the criticism of things that nine-tenths of the British people hold precious. We do not think that Mr. Wells needs any protection against such a foe as the noble Lord, to use Parliamentary language, but Winterton need not have insulted nine-tenths of the British public. For it is certain that nine-tenths of the British public does not place any faith in prayers, nor would that proportion of sane men and women back up the foolish prayer campaign in which Lord Gort appears to have indulged. We have no desire to stop Lord Gort praying when he pleases and as often as he pleases, but for a member of the House of Commons to protest against Lord Gort being told publicly that he acted foolishly is not yet a crime. Nor will it be one until Hitler—or Lord Winterton—rules the roost.

The *Schoolmaster* says that "The National Union of Teachers" strongly support the giving of religious instruction in all schools, and are desirous that this teaching shall be effective. But we are strongly opposed to the appointment of members of the clerical profession to

supervise and inspect the work of the teachers.' We understand the objection of the teachers, but cannot compliment them on their logic, nor even on the common-sense displayed. If teachers support the teaching of religion in schools (the *Schoolmaster* must be well aware that large numbers would like it out of the schools) then they must not be surprised if the parsons think that someone representing them should be appointed to see that the right sort of religion is given in the right sort of way. And no one doubts that so long as religion is in the schools the clergy will strive to control it, and that they are justified in so doing. Teachers should make up their mind, and then publicly act. The situation is largely in their own hands. But until teachers are bold enough to say that the teaching of a sectarian creed should not be carried on in State schools they must expect clerical interference.

During the black-out the West London Branch of the N.S.S., are going to continue social activities. On Sunday, November 17, from 3-5 p.m., they are holding a Social for their members at the house of Mrs. Woolstone, 55 Warrington Crescent, W.9. This is quite near Warwick Avenue Tube Station and the house can also be reached by Nos. 6 and 12 buses.

We were very pleased to receive the August issue of our Indian contemporary *Reason*, and to know thereby that it is still in the land of the living. We fancy that the last couple of issues did not reach us, and the war may be responsible for that. The journal is as well got up, as well produced, and as interesting as usual. These are not easy days in which to produce any paper, whatever its character, and there are special difficulties in India so far as a Freethought paper is concerned. There is a great battle for Freethought to be fought in India, with its many religions, and in that battle *Reason* is playing a distinctive and distinguished part. The journal is issued monthly at 5-12 Queen's Road, Bombay, price 4 annas per copy. It may also be ordered through the *Freethinker* office.

Birmingham is to have Sunday afternoon and evening musical entertainments. This has aroused considerable opposition from the very Christian part of the population, which appears to be wondering how on earth Father, Son and Holy Ghost can expect to retain the attention of the public in the face of attractive concerts, cinemas and theatres. Even a Sunday excursion on a fine day is likely to force the Trinity among the "also ran." The power of religion was always great so long as no one faced it. Then it either had to forcibly suppress its challenger or give way. Tylor pointed out that many a religious vision had owed its existence to an empty stomach, but religion has owed just as much to an empty head.

Of course opposition was offered to the proposal. Canon Guy Rogers (Rector of Birmingham) objected that cinemas and theatres desire to recoup their losses. Well, why not? Cinemas and theatres have to pay rates and taxes for their places of business. Canon Rogers evades both for his business establishment. Cinemas and theatres depend for their congregation upon the desire of people to come. Canon Rogers would like to have all other places of entertainment closed so that his audience will be forced to come by the drear dullness of Sunday. Dare Canon Rogers meet the entertainment world on fair and equal terms? Everyone knows that he and his like dare not risk it.

A Rev. Noel Hutchecraft assisted Canon Rogers by saying that the character of the nation was threatened by the opening of places of entertainment that had a purely commercial basis. Well, if the character of this country is threatened by a musical performance or by a wild-west film it must have a poor character indeed. And if that character can be maintained only by the energies of such men as Canon Rogers and Mr. Hutchecraft, then it hardly seems worth preserving. Imagine the impudence of any number of parsons, whatever their brand may be, standing up and declaring "The nation's character depends upon us." It would be insulting if it were not so amusing.

A Ghost of a God

THERE is no doubt that L. Gordon Rylands has endeavoured to keep to scientific principles, and my comment might help in this direction by removing a number of unnecessary assumptions. My criticism is not of the kind that he is likely to receive from theological critics, and does not invalidate either his theory or achievements. His work affords an interesting study of the mentality of the ancient world. It also affords a study of the writer himself, and this article might be headed "A Critical Analysis of L. Gordon Rylands."

Although he is particularly direct in some places; as when he suggests that some theological critics have been wilfully blind; refers to Christian writers who were not concerned with literal truth; and describes a mentality which could adapt any myth to its own purposes: yet he can still say that his book is not meant as a criticism of Christianity, that the Gnostic Paul is a more pleasing figure, and that the removal of the historical Jesus will purify Christianity. One might think that he is afraid of the susceptibilities of Christians, were it not for the number of inconsistencies and the general approach to the subject. It would rather seem that he fails to fully appreciate his own work: that he is still carrying around a Ghost of a God, as Chapman Cohen would say.

In one place he puts the proposition that the literature connected with a religion is a reflection of that religion and not a cause of it, but instead of keeping to that proposition, he talks about the metaphysical speculations of the early Gnostics giving rise to a new form of doctrine. He admits that there is no evidence of such speculation, but thinks that the assumption must be made to account for the doctrine. He will not need reminding that the theory of ideas was put forward by Democritus to account for sight, hearing, and smell; in answer to the question, how are we aware of objects at a distance? and that the theory was expounded by Plato to explain such abstractions as truth, beauty, and wisdom. The point is that all the metaphysical speculation had been done by the Greek philosophers. As he elsewhere recognizes, that they philosophized means no more than that they were familiar with Greek philosophy. His assumption that they indulged in metaphysical speculation is not only unnecessary, but appears to blind him to the actual facts of the case. As he says, the satirists had rendered the old nature worship untenable, so these early Gnostics were under the necessity of reconciling this philosophy with their religion, if they were to continue the beliefs and practices associated with it. This was done by the simple expedient of identifying the metaphysical abstractions with the being or beings whom they worshipped.

The Greek philosophers had given a natural explanation of the physical realm, so these pseudo philosophers eschewed anthropomorphism—the powers of the deity were delegated to other beings. The disguise might obscure, but it did not remove the belief. Greek philosophy with its explanation of the natural world, discovered the fact of death. The Egyptians embalmed the body, and like others interred the personal property with the corpse; they believed that the spirit continued to exist. Pseudo philosophy, talking of immortality, perpetuated the belief. Being compelled to accept the death of the body, they associated the spirit with the immaterial world of ideas. But yearning for immortality means no more than the desire to continue the beliefs and practices associated with it. The disguise might conceal, but does not destroy the identity of the belief. The belief in resurrection is still continued, and given a symbolical significance, and in that sense becomes of greater importance.

Greek philosophy, successful in the physical sphere,

had been woefully out of its depth in the sociological and psychological spheres. So these Gnostics (with their apparent antipathy to nature worship) concentrated their attention in that direction. God and the intermediate spirit or spirits, operated in the social sense in communion, and in the psychological sense in the intellectual and emotional activities of men and women. If the gods have been banished from the natural or physical realm, they gain importance by concentrating attention in the most intimate manner in human affairs. Mr. Rylands rightly observes that there is no oriental dualism. Good is associated with the spirit and evil with the body, but the body is only a symbol and the carnal impulses are but thinly disguised. The phraseology may be philosophical but the content is theological.

Being pre-occupied with the documentary evidence, Mr. Rylands appears to pay too little attention to the practical aspect of religion. Religious doctrines and beliefs cannot be divorced from the practices which they are supposed to explain or justify. Whether an idol is a god or a symbol, it is still the same thing. Driving out evil spirits and purifying the body is still asceticism; the same in practice. Failure to appreciate this leads him into hopeless inconsistency. These Gnostics were supposed to be hostile to the Jewish Law, yet they continued the practices of the Jewish religion. They were supposed to be hostile to Paganism, yet they were ready to adapt themselves to it by allegorizing the myths. They did not say that sacrifices should not be made, but argued whether such sacrifices should be eaten. They did not deny the existence of Pagan gods, but said they were evil. The questions are never questions of practice, but of doctrine. They were obviously ready to continue any practice if it could be reconciled with doctrine.

Mr. Rylands is unable to deny the continuous degeneration of Gnosticism as it progressed, but suggests that it was degenerate in its later stages. But if these unnecessary assumptions and inconsistencies are removed it will be seen that the whole process is one of what is called in modern psychology, rationalization. Mr. Rylands claims that the Gnosticism of the earliest Pauline strata is superior to the doctrine of the later editors. But that is merely because it is undeveloped, for the same reasons he might say that the embryo Gnosticism of Wisdom is superior to them all. Nevertheless, its simplicity does not obviate its implications. As he himself points out, it was these implications which led to the Gnostic heresy, when some of them claimed that the Creator of this world was evil, and that the Christ could not have lived in the flesh for a similar reason. Mr. Rylands is obviously correct in showing the doctrinal conflict of parties within the early Church, but there is no need to claim superiority for the Gnosticism of Paul, or a Catholicizing editor who desired to eliminate the Gnosticism. It was merely a continuation of the rationalizing process of reconciling religion with philosophy. He leads himself into the confusion by using two different terms; the early Gnostic movement was universalistic, and the later Christian movement was Catholic: which simply means that Gnosticism was a catholicizing movement. In one passage he draws a parallel between this general movement and Neo Platonism; the parallel is closer than he realizes, and the more pleasing figure of Paul vanishes if we realize that a prostrate Plotinus or a God intoxicated Gnostic is no more pleasing than a prostrate dipsomaniac. There is the same element of auto-suggestion and self-deception.

The implications of Gnostic doctrine are plain, and it was only a question of time before a complete reconciliation of philosophy with religion left religion in all its nakedness. Mr. Rylands appears to think that the removal of the historical Jesus will purify the Christian religion, and that the adoption of a modernized form of Pauline Gnosticism would be a step for-

ward. It is almost pathetic to find him ending on this note, but there is a difference between the reconciliation of philosophy with religion, and the reconciliation of modern science with religion, and to the precise extent that his own work is scientific, it has contributed to the downfall of the Christian superstition.

H. PREECE

Books worth While

British Liberty in Danger, by Ronald Kidd (Lawrence and Wishart at 5s.).

In the fight for British Liberty, no section of the community has played a finer part than the Freethinkers. From the time of Richard Carlile, and before that on to Charles Bradlaugh and the formation of the Secular Society right up to the present day, in every fight for freedom and liberty, the Freethinkers of Britain have been in the van. To-day, many of the liberties which we enjoy and which now, more than at any time in our history, are in such grievous danger, were established by the disinterested efforts of the hundreds of known and unknown men and women who took part in the fight.

For this reason alone, this book of Ronald Kidd's comes at a most opportune moment, when those liberties are in a greater danger of being filehed from us than ever before.

Mr. Kidd is the Secretary of the National Council of Civil Liberties, a society which has done magnificent work in hundreds of cases and in championing causes which, if they had not had the support of an official body, would undoubtedly have been lost.

British Liberty in Danger has an introduction by Mr. H. W. Nevins, himself an old and tried fighter in the cause of democracy. In his foreword he says: "This is a book that should be in the hands of every British subject, no matter what party may be in power, our British liberties are continually threatened and under the extreme emergency of war as at the present time, this threat is worse."

The author covers a wide range, dealing with the repressive legislation between 1914 and now, the misapplication of statutes, and war-time emergency legislation. When one reads the chapters on the police, especially dealing with the Fascist Meeting at Olympia in 1934, one comes to the conclusion that, after all our police are not so very wonderful. Mr. Kidd says: "When we compare the attitude consistently adopted by the police towards Fascists and their policy of violence, provocation and Jew-baiting with the treatment meted out to the Labour Movement, we may, not unreasonably infer partiality."

About the time of the Olympia Meeting, Hitler and Mussolini were in high favour with the Tories, and the Government were looking on the Blackshirts with a kindly eye. This no doubt accounts for the partiality Mr. Kidd mentions.

Many cases of prosecution in the Courts are quoted, very often made out upon the slenderest evidence, and usually against people in poor financial circumstances. In such instances Mr. Kidd and his society have done much splendid work in ventilating these charges, and frequently obtaining either a dismissal of the charge or a substantial reduction of the heavy fines inflicted by biased ignorant magistrates who frequently ordered them, not in proportion to the offence, but because the men charged happened to hold certain political views of which they did not approve.

It is only by having a well-instructed public opinion that repression and unjust legislation can be prevented, and in his book Mr. Kidd has done us all a valuable service in showing how right can be protected even under the present war-time legislation. He truly

says: "We are still a democracy, and if the people of this country will only take their democracy seriously, educating themselves in the knowledge of the facts and resolutely opposing any reactionary tendency as it arises—we may yet save our democracy from extinction."

F. A. HORNIBROOK

Some Reflections on Islam

II.

As in Christianity, the most terrible sin in the religion of Mahomed is infidelity, and the precepts in the Koran against infidels are particularly savage. They have to be killed wherever found, particularly those nearer home, so to speak—those in Mecca, for example. Tolerance, as we understand it, seems unknown to the original Moslems, and to those who are still bound by the letter of the law of Mahomed. In fact, death is the penalty for the apostate, who must be executed wherever found; he must be made neither a friend nor a protector.

As for the most sacred of human ties, marriage, the Koran gives many precepts which the faithful cannot but accept in their entirety, the reason being, naturally, that the Koran is God's Word, and is therefore unchangeable. Women are very inferior animals, the Mahomedan being allowed to have four legal wives as well as "slaves." Needless to say, women are not permitted to have four husbands and as many or more "boy friends." Again, a Mahomedan can divorce his wife or wives with hardly any formality, but a woman is not under any circumstances allowed the same privilege. How the marriage law of Mahomed worked out in practice, can be seen in the way many of his successors filled their harems. According to Gibbon, the Caliph Abdulrahman had 6,300 wives, concubines, and eunuchs in his palace; and possibly this number other Mahomedan princes have equalled or exceeded. It need hardly be added that the unfortunate Moslem worker or shopkeeper had to foot the bill, taxes having to be paid under conditions of the utmost severity.

This leads one to slavery, which Mahomed actually legalized. It was rampant all over Islam, particularly among the most fervent believers of the Koran. If it is not now so universal among the Mahomedans it is simply because of the advance of civilization which hit their religion as much as it did Christianity. When both religions were at their highest, slavery was a recognized institution, and it was taken for granted by the people for whom the Bible and the Koran were heaven-sent, and whose law could not be questioned.

Mahomed believed that the birth of Jesus was "immaculate," the angel Gabriel making Mary pregnant by blowing somehow into her body, which after all is not any sillier than the Gospel story. As for the Crucifixion he did not believe that it was Jesus who died on the cross, but a substitute who resembled him, a story probably told him by some monk who did not like to think that God Almighty could be crucified either as himself or his own son. There are other curious details with regard to the stories of the Bible in the Koran which are well worth reading, and which prove what a lot of funny legends must have been floating around about the Bible in the sixth and seventh centuries. One can see how, until its text was as well as possible fixed, the imagination of many pious believers played round the holy legends, fancifully weaving explanations or additions, the very stuff of folk lore and fairy tale.

The angel Gabriel seems to have made a special pet of Mahomed, for it was he, with a strange animal, the Borak, who accompanied the Prophet up the seven heavens from which angels, patriarchs, and prophets,

saluted the visitor as one of themselves. After this, Mahomed went on alone and received the friendly touch of God himself, though the touch was so cold that he was obliged to shudder. He then returned to Jerusalem, and rode on the Borak to Mecca, and according to Mr. B. S. Bose's work on Mahomedanism "performed in the tenth part of a night the journey of many thousand years." The legends surrounding Mahomed are, as one must expect, just as silly as any of those about Jesus, but they form no bar to belief either in Islam or Christianity. In the face of the amount of credulous nonsense surrounding modern Roman Catholicism, it is really very humorous to find so many eminent converts laughing at other religions. Or do they—now?

What of Mahomed himself as a man? He has had his detractors, and his champions, like Carlyle, who made him one of his Heroes, and who certainly looked upon him as a great man. Mr. Bose, a Hindu himself, recognizes his faults and failings, says:—

There can be no doubt that Mahomed is worthy of all praise. . . . I am myself tempted to believe that he was the greatest genius the world has ever produced. His friends and companions had higher respect for his person than those of Buddha or Christ, the other two great religious reformers of the world. The countrymen of Jesus were not his followers and his nation still disowns him. Buddha and Mahomed were not disowned by their countrymen, and they had many followers in their lifetime. . . . Mahomedanism rapidly spread through Arabia, so much so that with the exception of the followers of Mosleima, who lived in a small part of Arabia, the rest of the Arabs became Mahomed's followers in his life time. . . . Mahomed by calling himself a mere man has stopped the way of his deification. In this respect he is far superior to Christ and Buddha.

In spite of Mr. Bose's declaration, a careful reading of his book does not exactly show how he comes to the conclusion that Mahomed was the greatest genius the world has ever produced—unless he insists that it is because he himself is inclined to agree more with the Prophet than with Jesus or Buddha. There is no superior merit in recognizing one God rather than several; nor is there in forbidding wines or games of chance. Mahomed supported, on the other hand, such evils as polygamy and slavery—though it is only fair to add that he abolished infanticide, an infamous practice much in vogue then among the Arabs.

Mahomed was a great believer in "charity"—his well known pronouncement on the question being "give alms." Do Mahomedans obey this injunction? Perhaps they do, though it would always be better to try and discover why people have to want alms and remove the cause. As far as I have read, I have not seen where Mahomed had even an inkling as to the cause of poverty. Jesus wanted all people—except a few—to be poor, even poor in spirit, and properly humble before their betters, an attitude which seems to be a quality of Mahomedanism also.

While the caste system operates to an absurd extent in India, and the class system is obviously part of Christianity, Mahomedans seem quite free in this matter. They will eat together quite unconcernedly, and even drink out of the same glass. They have no priesthood, though they have learned men who know and expound the Koran much as our theologians expound the Bible.

We must admit that it was the Mahomedans or some of them who preserved the torch of knowledge, while Christian Europe was wallowing in the filth and ignorance of the Dark Ages. I am indeed surprised as I read the extent of their knowledge and discoveries—which could form the subject of many articles. The interested reader should consult Gibbon or *The Legacy*

of Islam. But there is no need for all that to give credit to Mahomed himself, or to belief to him, for all this learning. Perhaps the atmosphere in general in Mahomedan countries was freer in these matters to that of priest-bound Europe then under the domination of a credulous and ignorant religion.

And just as the shaking off of the shackles of religion in Europe has resulted in stupendous progress in all branches of learning, so perhaps will the impact of European civilization re-awake the pious Mahomedan. He, too, has fallen somewhat asleep under the weight of his Divine authority, the Koran.

H. CUTNER

Heresies and Heretics

(Continued from page 658)

EIGHTH. With having doubted that God was the author of the 109th Psalm.

The portion of that Psalm which carries with it the clearest and most satisfactory evidences of inspiration, and which has afforded almost unspeakable consolation to the Presbyterian Church, is as follows:—

Set thou a wicked man over him; and let Satan stand at his right hand.

When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become sin.

Let his days be few; and let another take his office.

Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.

Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour.

Let there be none to extend mercy unto him; neither let there be none to favour his fatherless children.

Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.

But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for Thy name's sake; because Thy mercy is good, deliver thou me. . . . I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth.

Think of a God wicked and malicious enough to inspire this prayer. Think of one infamous enough to answer it.

Had this inspired Psalm been found in some temple erected for the worship of snakes, or in the possession of some cannibal king, written with blood upon the dried skins of babes, there would have been a perfect harmony between its surroundings and its sentiments.

No wonder that the author of this inspired Psalm coldly received Socrates and Penelope, and reserved his sweetest smiles for Catherine the Second!

NINTH. With having said that the battles in which the Israelites engaged with the approval and command of Jehovah surpassed in cruelty those of Julius Caesar.

Was it Julius Caesar who said, "And the Lord our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain"?

Did Julius Caesar send the following report to the Roman Senate? "And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, three-score cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og, in Bashan. All these cities were fenced with high walls, gates, and bars; besides unwalled towns a great many. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon, King of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women and children of every city."

Did Cæsar take the city of Jericho "and utterly destroy all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old"? Did he smite "all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings, and leave none remaining that breathed, as the Lord God had commanded"?

Search the records of the whole world, find out the history of every barbarous tribe, and you can find no crime that touched a lower depth of infamy than those the Bible's God commanded and approved. For such a God I have no words to express my loathing and contempt, and all the words in all the languages of man would scarcely be sufficient. Away with such a God! Give me Jupiter rather, with Io and Europa, or even Siva, with his skulls and snakes, or give me none.

Tenth. With having repudiated the doctrines of "total depravity."

What a precious doctrine is that of the total depravity of the human heart! How sweet it is to believe that the lives of all the good and great were continual sins and perpetual crimes; that the love a mother bears her child is, in the sight of God, a sin; that the gratitude of the natural heart is simple meanness; that the tears of pity are impure; that for the unconverted to live and labour for others is an offence to heaven; that the noblest aspirations of the soul are low and grovelling in the sight of God; that man should fall upon his knees and ask forgiveness, simply for loving his wife and child, and that even the act of asking forgiveness is, in fact, a crime!

Surely it is a kind of bliss to feel that every woman and child in the wide world, with the exception of those who believe the five points, or some other equally cruel creed, and such children as have been baptized, ought at this very moment to be dashed down to the lowest glowing gulf of hell!

Take from the Christian the history of his own Church; leave that entirely out of the question, and he has no argument left with which to substantiate the total depravity of man.

A minister once asked an old lady, a member of his Church, what she thought of the doctrine of total depravity, and the dear old soul replied that she thought it a mighty good doctrine if the Lord would only give the people grace enough to live up to it!

Eleventh. With having doubted the "perseverance of the saints."

I suppose the real meaning of this doctrine is, that Presbyterians are just as sure of going to heaven as all other folks are of going to hell. The real idea being, that it all depends upon the will of God, and not upon the character of the person to be damned or saved; that God has the weakness to send Presbyterians to Paradise, and the justice to doom the rest of mankind to eternal fire.

It is admitted that no unconverted brain can see the least of sense in this doctrine; that it is abhorrent to all who have not been the recipients of a "new heart"; that only the perfectly good can justify the perfectly infamous.

It is contended that the saints do not persevere of their own free will—that they are entitled to no credit for persevering; but that God forces them to persevere, while, on the other hand, every crime is committed in accordance with the secret will of God, who does all things for his own glory.

Compared with this doctrine, there is no other idea, that has ever been believed by man, that can properly be called absurd.

As to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, I wish with all my heart that it may prove to be a fact. I really hope that every saint, no matter how badly he may break on the first quarter, nor how many shoes he may cast at the half-mile pole, will foot it bravely down the long home stretch, and win eternal heaven by at least a neck.

Twelfth. With having spoken and written some-

what lightly of the idea of converting the heathen with doctrinal sermons.

Of all the failures of which we have any history or knowledge, the missionary effort is the most conspicuous. The whole question has been decided here, in our own country, and conclusively settled. We have nearly exterminated the Indians; but we have converted none. From the days of John Eliot to the execution of the last Modoc, not one Indian has been the subject of irresistible grace or particular redemption. The few red men who roam the Western wilderness have no thought or care concerning the five points of Calvin. They are utterly oblivious to the great and vital truths contained in the Thirty-nine articles, the Saybrook platform, and the resolution of the Evangelical Alliance. No Indian has ever scalped another on account of his religious belief. This of itself shows conclusively that the missionaries have had no effect.

R. G. INGERSOLL

(To be continued)

Correspondence

"ENEMY ACTION"

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—May I thank the many readers who have sent letters of sympathy to me in the bombing of my house, in which I suffered with many others. The general tone of the correspondence clearly indicated the sincerity which unites Freethinkers when in difficulties.

I am pleased to state the house is being repaired and made habitable, and I hope to soon be able to return there.

F. V. SKIDMORE

Obituary

LYDIA SARAH HARVEY

THE remains of Lydia Sarah Harvey were interred in the Wandsworth Cemetery, on Thursday, October 31. A Freethinker practically all her life she served the cause by the example of her character and courage, maintaining her principles until the end, which took place at the ripe age of 91 years. At the graveside before relatives and friends a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary N.S.S.—R.H.R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.0, C. E. M. Joad, M.A., D.Litt.—"Time and Immortality."

OUTDOOR

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

COUNTRY

INDOOR

DARLINGTON (Labour Hall, Garden Street) : 6.15, Sunday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate) : 3.0, Mr. T. H. Elstob—"The Outlook of a Bishop."

OUTDOOR

CHESTER-LE-STREET (The Bridge) : 11.0, Sunday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BOOKS WORTH READING

BOOKS BY CHAPMAN COHEN

A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT. A Statement of the Case for Freethought, including a Criticism of Fundamental Religious Doctrines. Cloth Bound, 3s. 6d., postage 3½d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL. Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.

DETERMINISM OR FREE-WILL? An Exposition of the Subject in the Light of the Doctrines of Evolution. Second Edition. Half-Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Series. Five Vols., post free 12s. 6d., each volume 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.

FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION. A Lecture delivered at Manchester College, Oxford, with Appendix of Illustrative Material. Paper, 9d., postage 1d.

FOUR LECTURES ON FREETHOUGHT AND LIFE. Price, 1s., postage 1½d.

CHRISTIANITY, SLAVERY AND LABOUR. Fourth Edition. Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

GOD AND THE UNIVERSE. With a Reply by Prof. A. S. Eddington. Cloth, 3s., postage 3d.; paper, 2s., postage 2d.

LETTERS TO THE LORD. Cloth, 2s., postage 2d.; paper, 1s., postage 2d.

LETTERS TO A COUNTRY VICAR. Containing eight letters in reply to questions from a South Country Vicar. Cloth, 2s., postage 2d.; paper, 1s., postage 1½d.

G. W. FOOTE

BIBLE ROMANCES. 2s. 6d., postage 3d.

SHAKESPEARE & OTHER LITERARY ESSAYS. Cloth, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. For Freethinkers and Inquiring Christians. (With W. P. BALL). Seventh Edition 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.

THE JEWISH LIFE OF CHRIST. Translated from the Hebrew. Preface by G. W. Foote. 6d., postage ½d.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SECULARISM. 2d., postage ½d.

WILL CHRIST SAVE US? 2d., postage ½d.

G. W. FOOTE and A. D. McLAREN

INFIDEL DEATH-BEDS. Cloth, 2s., postage 3d.

Col. R. G. INGERSOLL

ABOUT THE HOLY BIBLE. 3d., postage 1d.

MISTAKES OF MOSES. 2d., postage ½d.

ORATION ON THOMAS PAINE. 2d., postage ½d.

ROME OR REASON? A Reply to Cardinal Manning. 3d., postage 1d.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. 2d., postage ½d.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH. 1d., postage ½d.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH. 1d., postage ½d.

WHAT IS RELIGION? Contains Col. Ingersoll's Confession of Faith. 1d., postage ½d.

WHAT IS IT WORTH. A Study of the Bible. 1d., postage ½d.

Dr ARTHUR LYNCH

BRAIN AND MIND. 6d., postage 1d.

MATERIALISM RE-STATEd. Contains chapters on: A Question of Prejudice—Some Critics of Materialism—Materialism in History—What is Materialism?—Science and Pseudo-Science—The March of Materialism—On Cause and Effect—The Problem of Personality. Cloth, 3s. 6d., postage 2½d.

OPINIONS: RANDOM REFLECTIONS AND WAY-SIDE SAYINGS. With Portrait of Author. Calf, 5s.; Cloth Gilt, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

PAGAN SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT. Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

RELIGION AND SEX. Studies in the Pathology of Religious Development. 6s., postage 6d.

SELECTED HERESIES. Cloth Gilt, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH. A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Future Life, with a Study of Spiritualism from the Standpoint of the New Psychology. Cloth Bound, 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

THEISM OR ATHEISM? The Great Alternative. An Exhaustive Examination of the Evidences on Behalf of Theism, with a Statement of the Case for Atheism. Bound in full Cloth, Gilt Lettered, 3s. 6d., postage 2½d.

WOMAN AND CHRISTIANITY. The story of the Exploitation of a Sex. 1s., postage 1d.

W. MANN

MODERN MATERIALISM. A Candid Examination. Paper, 1s. 6d., postage 1½d.

SCIENCE AND THE SOUL. With a Chapter on Infidel Death-Beds. 3d., postage 1d.

THE RELIGION OF FAMOUS MEN. 1d., postage ½d.

THOMAS PAINE

THE AGE OF REASON. Complete edition, 202 pp., with a 44-p. introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d., postage 2½d. Or strongly bound in cloth with portrait, 1s. 6d., postage 3d.

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

THOMAS PAINE. An Investigation of Sir Leslie Stephen's criticism of Paine's influence on religious and political reform. An indispensable work for all who are interested in Paine and his influence. 6d., postage 1d.

BAYARD SIMMONS

FANFARE FOR FREETHOUGHT. A Collection of Verse, wise and witty, filling a gap in Freethought propagandist literature. Specially and tastefully printed and bound. 1s., postage 2d.

F. A. HORNIBROOK

SOME CHRISTIAN TYPES. 4d., postage 1d.

WITHOUT RESERVE. 2s. 6d., postage 4½d.

Almost An Autobiography

CHAPMAN COHEN

5 plates. Cloth gilt

Price 6s.

Postage 5d.

MORTGAGES available at 4½%, also 2nd Mortgages on Residences, Shops, Businesses, Farms, Hotels, Cinemas, Garages, and Building Finance. Any district or town. Enquiries without obligation.—SELECTED, 6 High Street, Kingsland, London. E.8