

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

— Founded 1881 —

VOL. LIII.—No 47

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1933

PRICE THREEPENCE

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Views and Opinions.

Let us De-bunk.

THERE is no short phrase in English that is quite the equivalent of the American "De-bunk," and that is a pity. But if the word looks ugly, it may be said that it stands for an ugly thing, and so form and content are in this instance well-matched. "Bunk" indicates a sham, a fraud, an imposture, whether in word or act. It exists in the case of a man trying to sell another a "gold brick." It exists when a Member of Parliament comes before the public wearing a look as though the cares and responsibilities of Empire are his, and only his devotion to the very highest ideals keeps him where he is. It is "bunk" when a parson stands in a pulpit and suggests that he has a degree of supernatural illumination that is denied ordinary humanity; or when an average journalist writes an article pretending that he has any other desire than that of getting his article accepted and paid for. It is "bunk" when our "pioneers of empire" claim that they have the welfare of the native races in view, and that upon them depends the development of civilization. All these things are summed up in the one word "bunk." And to "de-bunk," means stripping them of all their false glitter and presenting them in their stark reality.

There is running in one of the west-end picture-houses, a film entitled "The Private Life of Henry the Eighth." The name part is taken by Mr. Charles Laughton, whose impersonation of a murderer in "Payment Deferred" is one of the finest presentations of such a part I have ever seen. His "Henry" is not quite so good, it has not the same psychologic power, but it is still good. It will certainly give to those who have intelligence enough to appreciate it a far better conception of a king than will the Alice-in-Wonderland kind of a monarch that exists in the popular imagination.

The Burden of the "Sacred."

When I saw the "Private Life," I felt that I was witnessing a de-bunking process. I was also sure that the film would be followed by protests from those who have not yet outgrown the magical stage of kingship, and indeed I should not have been surprised had the film been forbidden. I am quite sure that no picture representing Victoria and Albert, or Edward and Alexandra, having a good ordinary and healthy row over the breakfast table would have been permitted, to say nothing of other thinkable scenes. Well, the protests have come, and they have followed anticipated lines. It is complained that the presentation of the king is undignified, his table manners are coarse; his fits of temper are "unkingly"; he is guilty of "bawdiness"; and the whole film is likely to debase our conception of history, and to lower this country in the eyes of foreigners.

But Henry's language, manner, and general conduct is really paying his period a greater compliment than it deserves. Henry's language on the stage is not so coarse, nor are his manners as bad as they were in fact. When the king eats his food with his fingers and throws the half-picked bones over his shoulder, he is doing what the gentry of the day habitually did. It was not for some time after that forks were invented, and then they were objected to by the ancestors of the type that to-day keeps the *Morning Post*, and the *Life* of the Duchess of York's baby, in being. There is no disputing Henry's "bawdy" tendencies, even when full allowance is made for his syphilitic condition which made the production of an heir to the throne difficult. And I am quite certain that no one would dare to reproduce on the stage the language of Henry. The times were coarse, language was coarse, conduct was "bawdy," habits were dirty, and the king and the queen belonged to their time, as the kings and queens of to-day belong to their times. Actually the fault that can be brought against the film is that it presents the language and manners of the courtiers and the king as too refined, and the whole surroundings, furniture, clothing, and general conditions as too clean. But in presenting a king or a Queen to a British audience something of the Christmas-tree atmosphere must be retained.

On the other hand, it is to be remembered that the play deals with Henry's "private life" not with his whole career. And Mr. Laughton does indicate Henry's regard for his country, he shows the king's human delight when a child is born, and his pride in it as though an absolutely unique event had occurred, and his interest in a pretty woman. What ground is there for complaint? The only ground I can see is that the play does "de-bunk" the fetishistic idea of kingship. That is something that needs doing. I have in the last two issues been dealing with the evils of having a "sacred book," but it is quite as bad to have a sacred institution. If the public had a little

more of a private and human life of a king or a queen, we should find less of that idiotic wonder when either of them say a reasonable thing or perform a sensible action. Let us "de-bunk" our monarchs.

* * *

Twin Spirits.

Priest and King spring from the same root. The primitive king is one with the primitive medicine-man. The latter does not owe his position to a knowledge of the healing art, and the former does not owe his position to his superior powers, or even wisdom. They are incarnations of, or are in intimate communication with, the tribal spirits, and when the separation of the medicine-man from the chief takes place and the one develops into the full-blown priest, and the other into the full-blown king, the semi-supernatural quality of the latter is retained. The doctrine of the divine right of kings, the ceremonies which restrict contact with a king, and which in some cases actually forbid it, the religious aspect of a coronation, the unconscious ascription to a king of something above the level of ordinary men, all hark back to this supernatural origin of the institution. How otherwise are we to explain the praise of a queen who is a "good mother"—as though good mothers are not in ordinary life so common as not to attract notice—or the surprise when a king is found doing a decent thing or found saying a sensible one. Or the surprise when a king is seen behaving "just like an ordinary gentleman." It is a curious thing that while an intelligent Republican expects a monarch—other things equal—to behave like an ordinary man or woman, it is the royalist who shouts his surprise when he finds him doing so.

Now the "Private Life of Henry the Eighth" does to some extent "debunk" this superstitious conception of royalty. The king is presented as just an ordinary man, not quite so coarse as the man of his time, or as bawdy as a man of his time, or as dirty as a man of his time, but as near as modern manners will permit. He is just a lump of ordinary human nature, placed in an exalted position, and reacting to it as ordinary men would. If the people of to-day, particularly the "common" people, could realize—not merely in words, but in thought—that kings and queens are just ordinary men and women, neither wiser nor better than ordinary men and women, there would be a great change in our public life. There would be less of that semi-adoration of a member of the Royal Family, even when it happens to be a mere infant, less fawning before a title, and less readiness to sell oneself for one. There would be less of that stupid talk of devotion to "king and country," in which the affectation of personal affection is used to cover the stupid form of patriotism championed. In such a connexion there can be intelligent devotion to country only, and in that the king is no more than a public servant. When we are able to think—really think—of kings and queens as ordinary men and women, when we have completely "de-bunked" our conception of royalty, we shall have taken a step nearer a genuinely civilized society.

* * *

More De-bunking.

Kingship is not the only thing in modern life that needs de-bunking. Most of our institutions require the same process. Given an institution that has persisted for generations, and to the common mind—to be found as commonly in the university as in the gutter—it has acquired a "sacred" quality that makes its improvement a matter of extreme difficulty. We have to

de-bunk in order to get the people to recognize that there is not an institution in existence that we have, not merely the right, but the moral obligation to overhaul, to modify, or to destroy in the interests of a larger social life. It is because our social institutions have not been de-bunked, that reform is so difficult, and often has to be expressed in terms of revolution. In the minds of those overpowered by "bunk," that which has long existed must not be questioned. It has acquired a "sacred" character of its own. That is why in the case of Russia, instead of looking at it as an experiment in social reconstruction it was discussed in terms of crime. It is the same reason that is responsible for the difficulty experienced in getting such questions as Communism, or Socialism, or divorce discussed as they should be discussed. It lies also at the bottom of the mental obsession that the road to national safety lies through the maintenance of large armies and navies. The world suffers from the "bunk" that keeps alive the greatness of the soldier and the gallantry of warfare. Let modern war be seen for the filthy, cowardly thing it is, make the murder of masses of people at the command of this or that Government of no higher moral quality than the "taking for a ride" of a citizen at the command of an American gangster, and we shall have come within measurable distance of abolishing war. The pretence that "we" are arming for defence only (the "we" covers every country in turn) while others are arming for attack, is of no higher quality than the claim that "we" have the true religion, while all others are false ones. Let us "debunk" the army and militarism.

* * *

De-bunk Religion.

Finally, let us "de-bunk" religion. In a civilized society religion is almost pure bunk. It is kept in being by a mass of ceremonies that are almost pure humbug, by language that hypnotizes the thoughtless by the power of custom, and by claims that are sheer imposture. Consider the difference in effect between "And God said, Let there be light," and "Mumbo-Jumbo said, let us have light." Or the difference between "And Jesus said unto them," and "The great God Baldur said to his followers." In the one case the brain of the average man is partly paralysed by the use of a familiar phrase, in the other it is left free to criticize. Consider the difference in effect between a religious service preached in a cathedral, with all the usual theatrical properties in evidence, and the same sermon uttered by a man in ordinary dress sitting by a fireside with a pipe in hand and a jug of beer by his side. Put the contents of the Bible into current language, let a man say his prayers in the tone and with the language of everyday life, and the bunk connected with the Bible and with religion in general would soon be weakened.

By all means, after we have debunked our institutions let us de-bunk our religion. No, let us commence by de-bunking our religion; for when we have done this we shall probably find that we have de-bunked a great many other things in the process.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Thoughts that great hearts once broke for, we
Breathe cheaply in the common air;
The dust we trample heedlessly
Throbbled once in saints and heroes rare,
Who perished, opening for the race
New pathways to the commonplace.

Lowell.

Humiliating Hymns.

"Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon."
Shakespeare.

"Talk about it as we may, a man's breeding shows itself nowhere more than in his religion."—Holmes.

THE Bishops of the State Church are becoming almost iconoclastic. They resemble the curate who felt so excited that he wanted to "push a bus over." The Bishop of Winchester has issued a solemn warning against reducing the numbers of the armed forces of the country. The Bishop of London, after raising very large sums of money for the "starving" clergy, is now cutting the curates' salaries. Dr. Strong, the Bishop of Oxford, would like far fewer hymns included in church services. Here are his daring words:—

Sometimes I get so desperate that I feel that if I had to organise the world, I should have one hymn a year, on Ash Wednesday.

His Lordship will not forget, let us hope, that so many people in the pews believe that hymns are inspired, at least if they are in their own favourite hymnal. No one, of course, could think most of them inspired poetically, but their matter, if not their manner, is almost sacred, probably because they are assumed to verify something or other in the pages of the Christian Bible. So they are sung with fervour, if not with critical understanding.

The explanation of this pleasing state of affairs is due to the showmanship of the clergy. Recognizing that all who run can read, the Christian Churches have circulated a hymnology, and provided nothing to read which is beyond the mental reach of the dullest and stupidest of their congregations. We raise our hats to the clergy as smart men of business, but our admiration is diluted by the thought that, after all, they have "roped in" their congregations because they have never been able to rise above their level of intelligence. Clerical culture is a sham, a make-believe, and is not real culture at all. It is, in the last analysis, but the plausible patter of a sorry profession. The women in the pews may not be better informed than the men in the pulpits, but outside, the standard of culture has been raised of late years with disastrous effects on all the churches, chapels, and even tin-tabernacles. *Punch*, some years ago, hit this off in an excellent cartoon depicting a parson on his knees before a sceptical squire, saying, "Pray, pray, don't mention the name of another German theologian, or I shall resign my living."

It is very doubtful if the average hymn has any more claim to be considered as real literature than the usual music-hall song, which might well make an educated man ashamed of his own species. This may appear a grave indictment, but the hymns which are regarded as being eminently suited for public worship are not only unrhythmical and nonsensical, but actually stereotype a low form of culture which ought to be repressed and not perpetuated. Under the soporific influence of religion, the pious public has been far too ready to accept bleat and bombast as the fine gold of poetry, and has hailed hysteria in adjectives as the very quintessence of reverence.

The hymns used by the Church of England and by Nonconformists alike are not really much better than those painful and disgraceful compositions which are sung by Revivalists, Salvationists, Spiritualists, and other howling dervishes of our streets and open spaces. The charge of sentimentalism is not the only one that can be brought. Some hymns are brutal in tone and language, written in the worst possible taste, and are

full of sanguinary details and a glowing satisfaction which is repulsive. "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins," is a striking example which can be paralleled in scores of sanguinary hymns.

There is a frankness of materialism in some of these so-called "spiritual" songs, which is sufficient to make a sceptic smile. Such songs as "Oh! for the pearly gates of heaven, Oh! for the golden floor," are sung in thousands of places of worship in Christian England, but they suggest the negro-spirituals of the dark-coloured believers in the southern States of America. The famous "Rock of Ages" ought to send a University graduate raving mad. It is a veritable Niagara of irrational images and misapplied metaphors, an unique example of sloppy sentiment. "Cleft rock," "riven side," "to thy cross I cling," and "to the fountain fly," are a few examples. The author was indeed inspired, "intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity," as Disraeli wittily put it. "Onward Christian Soldiers," which is as popular as "Ain't it grand to be blooming well dead," is by no means above criticism. The last line of the chorus is commonplace in expression, and atrocious in rhyme.

There is more than a touch of humour in some of the newer hymns. The Church of England, in common with the Free Churches, is losing its grip on the working class, and especially among men. Hence it is not surprising to find impassioned appeals to the British working-man. Listen to the honeyed love-song of the clerical syren. It is glorious fun:—

Sons of Labour, think of Jesus
As you rest your homes within,
Think of that sweet babe of Mary
In the stable of the inn.
Think, how in the sacred story
Jesus took a humble grade,
And the Lord of life and glory
Worked with Joseph at his trade.

These few quotations, be it remembered, are from the most distinguished Christian hymn collections, and they are by no means the worst of their class. If any reader wishes his raven hair turned white, and curled afterwards, let him turn to the pages of the *War Cry*, and other similar publications, where he will find the work of bold, bad versifiers, strong in the Faith, but weak in their mother-tongue.

The great half-educated uncivilized Christian public likes its hymns highly-coloured and not plain. For one person who knows Milton's "Hymn on Christ's Nativity," there are thousands who love, and even admire, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," "The Glory Song," "Tell Mother I'll be There," and other maudlin melodies.

To an outsider, hymns would suggest restraint, sobriety, the dignity of reverence, but things are not always what they seem in a saucy world. The Aimée McPherson mission, like the Torrey and Alexander Crusade, the Moody and Sankey Circus, and many another attempted revival, amply prove the association of the Christian Religion with things far other than culture and civilization. What is more disturbing is that these sacred showmen gauged their pious public to a nicety. Their audiences were, perhaps, better dressed and possessed more pence than those who listen spellbound to the trombones, tambourines, and taradiddles of the Church and Salvation Armies, yet they sang hymns of the most rank and fulsome barbarity. Christian congregations seem quite unable to distinguish between poetry and doggerel, pathos and bathos, decency and indecency. Singing their delirious and hysterical rhymes, they are intellectually on a level with barbarians. Savages do this one way, and the countrymen of Gipsy Smith and the Bishop of

London another, but the nature of the act, and the results, are much the same. This impasse cannot be evaded much longer by men who may profess and call themselves Christian, who may even be ordained to the Christian ministry, but who most certainly have never been converted to civilization. The Bishop of Oxford would have only one hymn sung each year. That is precisely one too many.

MIMNERMUS.

Whither Freedom?

LOOKING at history period by period, it is often possible to resolve the social eddies of a particular age into two main conflicting currents. Some time ago it was felt that such a meeting of the waters was to be found in the far-reaching antagonism between Socialism and Capitalism, but to-day students of Western politics would probably agree that this has sunk to a place of secondary importance beside the great conflict now arisen between despotism and freedom. Many have called this a conflict between despotism and democracy, but that, to my way of thinking, is taking too rosy a view of democracy; for it implies that majority rule is in some way to be identified with freedom. In sober fact majorities may serve only to give a stronger sanction to intolerance, and the illusion of a free community can be created merely by pleasing so many people at once that their unanimous grunts of satisfaction swell into a volume of sound capable of drowning the thin voice of a protesting minority. Adolf Hitler, for instance, would be the first to tell us that the Nazi regime was essentially democratic, and would cite, in support of this, the "overwhelming majority" by which it was approved.

In seeking the antithesis of despotism, the only safe answer is therefore freedom, of the sort that shields under the wide sweep of its noble wing all forms of heresy, whether political or religious. But such is not the monopoly of any political camp or system. Reviewing the panorama of history we see all manner of political flags hoisted without regard to whether the period is despotic or free, an alternative that would appear to be settled by factors concerned with the degree of culture among a people, the general level of civility and the prevalence of certain psychological types, rather than by the institution of any political regime.

The superficial correspondencè that may exist between the spirit of an age and its political institutions is surely to be explained by the fact that the mind of the people will be reflected in their politics, rather than by any power of politics to modify the mind of the people; but neither the despotic nor the liberal mind is reflected by one political system more than by another, because, while it is true that our personal outlook will tend to reveal itself in the system of life which we advocate for society, despotism and liberality of mind are concerned less with the system than with the method of treating those who disagree with it. And that may be the same for all systems without substantially affecting their political complexion. For proof of this we need not go further than the common observations of every-day life. Listen to the despot discoursing to his own followers upon his own pet social theories, and you will find him indistinguishable from the most liberal fellow. If no dissentient crossed his path you would never discover, merely from the character of his Utopian nostrums, the tyrant that lies hidden beneath the urbane exterior. But when disagreement crops up the process of unmasking begins,

and you may find in men of the most divergent views an identical attitude towards opposition; conversely, men of entirely similar views may show vastly different reactions to criticism.

The despotic and the liberal approach to life thus resolve themselves into a matter of individual psychology. The tyrant and the man of liberal nature represent distinct psychological types which, if the verdict of mental science is correct, are developed in childhood as a result of influences not in the least connected with politics. The former type is eager to discover how many people he can bring under the compulsion of his will; the latter desires only to know the least number with whom he is forced to interfere. Withal, the despot is for ever bellowing about freedom, but you soon discover that his idea of the perfect liberty is that you should be free to do as he likes.

This obnoxious, this sadistic type is swarming in Europe at the present time, and, unfortunately for Europe, social and economic circumstances are furthering its growth. How are we to extirpate it without resorting to its methods? The time is ripe to ask this question in England now, for members of the species have been discovered on our shores in not inconsiderable numbers.

My idea (and I hope it is not a mere dream) would be to form what we might call a League of Freedom which, once organized, would create that formidable weapon known as a body of opinion. The public in time would be educated towards a spirit essentially hostile to despotic pretensions; and, whereas it is possible to manipulate a public having its thoughts only half formed or latent, it is not so easy to deal thus with a mass of people made articulate by the crystallization of their ideas. Public opinion, goodness knows, has been directed by the Press into every conceivable avenue of folly. It is surely not too much to hope that the Press could, with equal facility, introduce it to something sensible!

The league I envisage would consist of men of all shades of political and religious opinion, having of necessity only one common feature—the passionate desire for a life as free as the air they breathe. They would be men to whom the life of the mind is a glorious reality, and who would suffer under mental enslavement even as men of a different type would suffer were their bodies to be thrust into chains. They are the modern Athenians, still living in the mental atmosphere of that paragon among cities where Pericles, speaking to the people more than four hundred years before the birth of Christ, was able to say with truth:—

Not only in politics are we open-minded; without a scrap of jealousy we tolerate peculiarities of all sorts in each other's daily lives; we have no objection to our neighbour following the bent of his humour, nor do we put on black looks, innocuous maybe, but annoying.

Are there enough Athenians in Britain to-day to form a league? If so, do they care enough about freedom to go into action? As to the urgency of some such measure there can be little doubt. The swift and all-devouring spread of despotism in Europe, like a veritable plague, has by this time acquitted our mentors of calamity-howling. Men of first-rate intellect and foresight have spoken in ominous tones. The next step is to do something.

MEDICUS.

By words man interchanges thoughts, by the forms of art he interchanges feelings.

Tolstoy.

These Damnable Brains!

The average religious male parent of the nineteenth century was a powerful lambaster. He kept the muscles of his right arm well developed by wielding cane or strap on the vile bodies of the offspring he had procreated, who did not conform to his ideas of how they should comport themselves. The thrashing went to the music of his two favourite Scripture texts, which constituted his authority from the Lord of Hosts—who likewise could bare his right arm for the purpose of lambasting disobedient humans—1st (quick time) spare the rod and spoil the child; and 2nd (slower time as his right arm became tired) Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son that he receiveth; and on to the great "Amen." Happily the flogging fathers of the nineteenth century have had their wings clipped; and they only survive in a small minority in the twentieth. God alone knows how so many Victorian fathers succeeded in escaping the notice of the police and being criminally prosecuted for violent assault. But the conventions then being what they were, the lambasting was taken as a matter of course. Dad was a sub-God holding commission from the Almighty to rule his household with rigour. His failure to do so was in the estimation of himself and his brethren of the Faith a serious breach of duty!

There were, however, even in the nineteenth century, perverse bairns who could take their whippings with a surprising resolution. The young devils would often refuse to confess wrong-doing, and setting their teeth would also refuse to manifest any signs of being affected by the floggings they got, thereby cruelly tiring out papa's right arm and leaving him in a state of exhausted and impotent fury. "Ye'll no greet, will ye no—ye'll no greet will ye no. Ye limb o' Sawtan, but ah'll gar ye greet!" And if papa did not succeed in garring the limb o' Sawtan greet the said limb would either leave the parental presence a victor or collapse in a faint at the parental feet.

Yet when these young rebels grew up and their Earthly was replaced by a Heavenly Father, they had to concede that their Earthly father's conception of his parental duties was not out of keeping with what he had been taught by his religion. For they found when they became adults that the Heavenly Father also had a right arm which could wield the knout with power upon them. They found that submission to the Divine Will, and doing their bit in assisting the clergy—God's ambassadors on Earth—to advance the religion of their fathers guaranteed prosperity and comfort not only in the life that now is, but also in that which is to come. Those who continued to refuse to submit and to work for the advancement of religion on Earth, could depend upon adversity and discomfort in this life—continuous chastisement at the hands of the Heavenly Father; and everlasting Hell in the life which is to come. Where immediate material punishment here did not produce the intended results, the Heavenly Father had still a big shot in his locker—the ominous threat of eternal woe in the unknown and, to so many, terror-inspiring hereafter.

Supernaturalists are emotionalists. Reason with them must ever be subordinated to emotion: as witness every projected religious revival—the continuous appeals to Heart, Heart, Heart (an old Scotsman I knew once said you might as well feel with your liver as your heart), and the scheme of sharing emotional experiences such as is instituted by this egregious Oxford Group movement—presided over by an astute American. Why shouldn't some ardent young Oxford believer go over to the United States and start there a Harvard or Yale Group movement on competitive lines? In all conscience, we in this country have

every reason to reproach ourselves for our social evils—particularly the slums; but, on the showing of representative writers in the United States themselves, the conditions there are ten times more appalling than they are here. Any religious lead our people have had from America has apparently been based on hypocritical humbug. But it just proves that religion generally continues to be an obstruction to social regeneration.

Protestant Christians cannot have their cake and eat it. Every Protestant cleric is a Mr. Facing-both-Ways. If religion is to be effective it must involve complete obedience and implicit faith. Protestantism professes to be a system that encourages doubts, enquiries, searchings. Rome logically maintains that such encouragement necessarily lays the axe at the root of the tree of the omnipotence of Almighty God. These damnable brains of the infidels must be kept in subjection. Let the Lord God make bare his right arm against them! Who professes to believe that Divine lambastings have ceased? God is love, is he? Yes, he may be "love" towards the pious and submissive and brainless cringers who will "greet." But he is Hate—and Hate of a particularly virulent kind—towards the rebel heretics who have taken up arms against ecclesiasticism, and flout the arrogance of the dog-collared gentry who presume to dictate to their fellow beings.

Humanity has no room, time, place or use for either Romish confession or Oxford "sharing." Both equally exclude the full development of the human intellect. The Freethinker alone projects his brains into every field with absolute impartiality. There must be no barred doors to him. His reading of history has shown generation after generation of his kind kept in slavish and degrading subjection by the superimposed authority of the wills of greedy fellow beings who have pretended to act with the authority of a supposititious Almighty Creator and Governor of the Universe. He sees even in these days his fellow beings naked, starving and homeless in the midst of superabundant wealth. He is not surprised that cunning pulpiteers warn the poor masses against the "allurements of intellect." As of old, the widest knowledge must only be available to a small minority. Ah, if we all but *knew*! Religion does not thrive upon knowledge but upon credulity. The Oxford Group, like fancy predecessors, will droop and wane and fade and die. Its "mutual" confessional is but a flash in the pan. Rome has tried out a system which most fitly meets the needs of those "Safety Firsters" who require a religious belief; and no rival has ever supplanted her. But the *sine qua non* of receiving salvation through her is unquestioning, complete self-submission and adoring obedience. Jehovah has no intention of entering into competition with Cupid.

IGNOTUS.

The Real Bradlaugh.

BRADLAUGH,—in memory of whom we raise
Our voice in gratitude, and reverence bold;—
Nor laud his gifts with condescension cold
To drown the hero of the stormy days!
Men persecute their victim with their praise;
And with their sympathies would bind the brows
Of frauds they flatter; but our love allows
No compromise to rob him of his bays.
Let those who seek to honour, praise the Man,
Bent,—but victorious in the bitter strife
With Superstition to the end of life;
A mark for hate,—according unto plan.
The tyrant's terror! he,—religion's foe
Demands the tribute Justice would bestow!

WM J. LAMB.

The Book Shop.

"OTHER FIRES," by Maxim Gorki (published by D. Appleton & Co.), is the third volume of a trilogy covering Russian history as lived and seen by the writer, who almost appears to belong to the inexplicable category of those who do not want to govern or be governed. This attitude may be allowed to the author and the artist. Through the eyes of an individual, Clim Samghin, Gorki gives us an objective sketch of turbulent events up to the year 1905. There is no moral or propaganda or preaching or special pleading. Hundreds of characters come and go with their nobility and baseness set down by the hand of a master. Gorki knows too much of the world in which he lives to waste time in glorifying autocracy or its opposite, and this is its strength. The reader will find in this big book enough interest to sustain his attention to the end. One recurring decimal which sounds a note of warning to those who are still amenable to ideas is what Gorki describes as a "system of phrases." In itself it gives an impetus to thought. Phrases in many respects become in time the lifeless bodies of ideas. They are synonymous with the different shapes of a jigsaw puzzle. Clim Samghin, the chief character in the book is almost a soliloquising Hamlet. He has many penetrating remarks on the phenomenon of a broken autocracy. He moves at times in the world of introspection, and this side alone of the character is valuable material for the thoughtful. Marina Petrovna, the prophetess of a new sect in a religion, is a fascinating subject, although one need not go farther than London or a big provincial town of England to find her prototype.

Marina sets no value on reason. In this respect she is true to type. Reason, which is the bodyguard of common-sense, has always been and no doubt will be an Aunt Sally for those who choose to believe what they desire rather than the cold determination of facts. That brilliant man, Bergson, has written that "common-sense is fatiguing." No thinker worth his salt questions the truth of this statement for one moment, but perhaps not in the way that this wizard of words intended. Commonsense is uncommon, and it could not be otherwise. One looks back on history and sees the ghouls and boglights which have been thrust in the face of humanity by those who wish to rule by fear. In this list we must begin with the name of Constantine and finish with Rasputin, with others to be added as the scroll of time is unrolled. *Other Fires* will be of interest to Freethinkers, worth the time spent, and also as a book claiming shelf room on its historical merits alone. The reader is free to believe or not that a just estimation of Marina is made by Clim in the following sentence: "Sells church paraphernalia and flirts with free thought. Brags about being well-read. Eats and drinks voluptuously. Rather coarse. Lies about being alone 'in the woman's sense'—probably has a lover."

For those who have *In Praise of Folly*, an ideal companion to it is *Twenty Select Colloquies of Erasmus*. The whimsical author of both, who could be deadly with a smile, was a strange figure of his time. He could, without effort, "unstarch his gravity" about the most solemn question of his day; according to a biographer, "he was the most facetious man, and the greatest critic of his age. His reformation in learning drew on him the hatred of the ecclesiastics, who were no less bigoted to their barbarisms in language and philosophy, than they were in their superstitious and gaudy ceremonies in religion. They murdered him in their dull treatises, and libelled him in their wretched sermons." The recollection of reading this made me make a mental note, on the list of books to get, of this little gem in the "Abbey Classics." Keeping in mind the youthful Freethinker who must furnish his armoury with the best weapons of history, Erasmus may be taken as a type of mind uncomfortable within the periphery of the Church, a humanist at heart, and the times being such he was forced to use the weapons of irony and satire. As a notable example of this, the chapter entitled "The Religious Pilgrimage," in the book mentioned above, is as true

now as it was in the time when it was written. Although Erasmus has been dead since 1536, he is still sufficiently alive to interest the Roman Catholics to the extent of a big book (*Erasmus*, by Christopher Hollis) recently published, proving—well, what do the Roman Catholics prove of any Man who refuses to accept their nonsense over such matters as bread and water?—on top surface, and jesuitry inimical to the growth of human beings beneath.

Hardly in keeping with the title of this series and somewhat belated in the matter of time, the Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts, 1933, displayed one picture which made some contact with the world of familiar things. No. 78 was the oil painting of "A man with a pint," by Frederick W. Elwell, and this to ordinary people, not knowing where they came from and not knowing where they are going (Omar expresses this much better), is of more importance than pictures of "The Last Supper," which at best can only be the works of imagination.

C-DE-B.

Acid Drops.

The Very Reverend Dick Sheppard in the *Sunday Express* calls upon all true followers of Jesus to be out and out pacifists. In the act of preaching peace he announces the occurrence of a new war, but tells us that "Jesus can no longer walk in step with Jehovah." There is evidently war in Heaven. The Son has fallen out with the Father. But, on whose side Mary, Joseph and the Holy Ghost are we have no information up to the time of going to press.

Alderman R. T. Soper, M.P., of Barnsley told a pious gathering emphatically that, "It pays to love Jesus." Mr. Soper is to be congratulated on having grasped so clearly the essential message of the religion of Jesus. The ethic of that religion is one of bribes and punishment. There are promises of heavenly favours, here or hereafter, for doing "good," for believing in and loving God, and for obeying his alleged commandments. And there are threats of punishment for not so doing. The whole burden of Christ's song is that it "pays" to love God.

A Roman Catholic Church has just been opened in a suburb of Dublin. It holds 1,500 people, and costs over £33,000. The money will be easily found, as it always is for religion. Schools and churches form part of the organization of the Roman Catholicism, and no one can deny their effectiveness as propaganda. Once again our motto must be *eternal vigilance*.

Christian women all over the world must be proud of their own bishop—that is, the only Christian woman bishop in the world. She is the founder of the "Pillar of Fire" movement, and is quite as Fundamentalist as the Pope or General Higgins. The *Daily Express* managed to get her authoritative views on certain questions, and we are glad to note that she ridiculed those ignorant Modernists who are ashamed of a genuine hell-fire, and who claim that Hell is only a "state." This appalling disbelief, Bishop Alma White treats with withering scorn. "Hell is an actual world," she insists. "These sinners suffer eternal damnation in 'fire and brimstone.' It will not be that actually, but it will certainly be some form of everlasting torment." Of course, Christianity without a Hell for sinners is unthinkable, as every good, kind Christian woman knows. We stand by Bishop Alma, and earnestly recommend her to republish the late Father Furniss' brilliant description of Hell, vouched for by the Pope. The times need such a thorough-going corrective.

The *Catholic Herald* offers the Jews their sympathy because of the way they are being treated in Germany and

assures them that after the way they themselves have been persecuted in the past, their expressions of sympathy are sincere and heart-felt. We agree that there is little about persecution the Roman Catholics do not know.

Any attack on Roman Catholicism in history is, according to Fr. J. Wadsworth, just so much bunk. "We must turn the searchlight of truth," he said recently, "on the past. God knows we have nothing to be afraid of and everything to be proud of." He is right. Why should any Catholic be ashamed of the wholesale raping of Jewish women, and the foul massacre, torture and burning of Jewish men and women with which Catholic history is crammed? Why should any Catholic be ashamed of the massacres of St. Bartholomew, the Albigenses and the Waldenses, the torture, the rack and the stake of the Inquisition, the slaughter of old women and children as witches, the bloody wars in the Netherlands, the hunting of "heretics," and a thousand other crimes against humanity? Almost every modern Roman Catholic historian is proud of his Church's past, and we can quite believe it. But is anybody else?

The Bishop of St. Albans is equally against divorce and contraception on Christian grounds. In a lecture recently, he pointed out that Christ said that man and wife were "one flesh," so, of course, divorce ought to be made utterly impossible for them. If a man or woman is tied to a drunkard, a brute, a maniac, a murderer, or they loathe one another, they should be compelled never to separate because Christ said they were "one flesh." How utterly beautiful! As for contraception, the dear Bishop told his audience that "it was even said that seventy-five per cent of the contrivances were sold to unmarried persons." This was too utterly awful for even a Bishop to contemplate, but whether what "was said," was true or not really did not matter. It was a good enough reason for refusing married men and women information which prevents a woman becoming a mere breeding machine in many cases, and no truly orthodox Bishop or believer in Christ could stand that. Our only comment this time is that it is a pity Christ did not bring a dozen children into the world on the dole (or not even on that) in a slum. Perhaps his language would then have surprised even a Bishop.

Sometimes we read that Materialism is as dead as Queen Anne, and sometimes we read that Materialism is so rife that the very springs of right living are polluted. Sometimes the same writer takes the first position on Monday and the second position on Tuesday. Sir Charles Marston, in an article in the *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, in a passage which the Editor considers (or says he considers), "challenging and constructive," credits Materialism with enormous influence:—

When we think of the numbers that Materialism has driven to insanity and to suicide; when we think of the way it has sapped and undermined the Christian Faith; when we think of the Great War and its millions of victims; of Bolshevism and its many millions more; all the fruits of Materialism, we are loth to exaggerate the perils of Spiritualism, its opposing influence.

There is one peril of Spiritualism which, now it is our turn to speak, we would humbly call attention to, and that is that the most abject exhibition of written or spoken Toshi can always find a refuge under its protecting wing.

We notice that at the forthcoming meeting of the Church Assembly the clergy are to be urged to warn their parishioners as to the dangers attendant on marriages between members of the English and Roman Churches. Putting the facts baldly, the progress of any branch of the True Religion nowadays is recognized as depending entirely upon the fecundity of its communicants. There is no other way under Heaven by which Revealed Religion can, in these days, perpetuate itself.

The slur on what is called "illegitimacy" still exists in strange quarters. The form of birth-certificate known as the "plain certificate," which discloses only the name of the child, the date of birth, and place of registration, is accepted for elementary schools and life insurance purposes. For higher education, that is for secondary schools, training college or university, the birth certificate *must* show the names of the parents. It is pleasing to know that educationists are making an effort to make the "plain certificate" suffice for all cases. There is no justification for retaining any formality which may bring even a momentary feeling of humiliation to the owner of the certificate. Such relics of a barbaric past should be wiped out of existence.

Says Lord Ernle in the *Sunday Times*:—

Perhaps, however, one may wonder whether a tomato-lipped young woman with supplementary eyelashes is entitled to snigger at the mid-Victorian wearers of the bustle.

The Rev. Edmund Edward Wigram, of Bromley, appears amongst the latest wills, with a net personality of £70,156. In all such cases, we find that the advice of Jesus as to selling all and giving to the poor, the difficulty of rich men entering the Kingdom of God, and the inadvisability of laying up treasures on earth, is without a doubt to be taken figuratively. The rich know what Jesus meant. The poor may think otherwise, but who would leave theological interpretation to tramps?

The Methodist Missionary Society makes a fine advertisement of the information that it has the responsibility of 47 hospitals and dispensaries, 477, 338 out-patients, 17,980 in-patients, 49 doctors, and 269 nurses. The primary object, however, of this medical work when it was started was to capture the "heathen" for Christ. And the question is, would it have been started if some easier and less expensive method could have been adopted for the same end? Furthermore, how long would it be carried on if the discovery were made that it was failing to be useful for attracting the "heathen"?

Of John Galsworthy, a Nonconformist reviewer of his last book, *Over the River*, says:—

His was a hand that could set down with unerring skill the things that eye could see and hear. Old Mother-Barth never had a more faithful son. He knew her moods; she whispered to him many of her most precious secrets, and gave him the clue to the greatest of them all, for she made him love Truth and Beauty. Yet somehow he missed his way. He never found the path which leads from the beauty of the earth to its Source and Fountain, and all his days he remained a stranger to the innermost message of the Christian Faith.

This was only natural, since he loved Truth and Beauty.

Confession, 'tis said, is good for the soul. But the following confession by a parson is not accurate enough to be good. "We are ashamed to-day that the Great War found the Churches of this land uncertain where they stood." The contrary was the case. The Churches were quite certain that they were on the side of "patriotism." Anyway, nine-tenths of the parsons were certain, and their Churches did not undecieve them.

The Bishop of Bristol asked a pious gathering to imagine a Bristol without Christ. After the shudders had faded, he asked them to imagine a Bristol with Christ—"a city of love would sweep away all slums, would revive the hope of the unemployed, and be full of beauty." Hallelujah! However, this country is not without some experience of cities "with Christ." There have been times when the cities were full of people who sincerely believed in Christ, attended regularly the churches, and practised what they imagined was Christ's teaching. At the same time there were slums, and unemployed (hundreds by the hundred), and absence of beauty, and cruelty, and brutality (often as not executed by re-

ligious beliefs). The Bishop of Bristol must have been trading on pious ignorance, or else his innocence was as sublime as that of his audience.

Christians do not like the world-famous event of Jesus cursing the fig-tree. They have, of course, to accept it as it is, part of the Divine Revelation, but the average Christian would move heaven and earth to be able to delete the blessed event. Various explanations have been offered—most of them failing to do justice to gentle Jesus, but Roman Catholics are never at a loss over Bible difficulties. The real reason why Jesus cursed the fig-tree was to put "a parable in action" or in case this is rather uncertain, it was "a miracle to warn the Jews." "The fig-tree," we are told, "had abundant foliage but no fruit. The Jews similarly had abundant outward professions of piety, but no internal holiness. Accordingly Our Lord caused it to wither suddenly, as a warning of what was to happen to the Jews if they failed to bring forth fruits."

We have read exactly 9,873 explanations before, and this makes the 9,874th, and it would be difficult to get so much bunk in a few lines dealing with any other subject. The reason given in Matthew is that Jesus "hungered," and seeing only "leaves" on the tree he cursed it, and Mark says the same. There is nothing about the "abundant foliage," and, that it was meant as a lesson for the Jews who had no "internal holiness," is sheer fudge, and the dear Roman Catholic editor who gave the above explanation knows this is as well as we do. Still the doubting Thomas who does not like the soul-stirring story had to be silenced, and we hope he will be satisfied. Whether he will be is another tale.

The recent exposition of the Holy Coat of Treves, has naturally resulted in a crop of "genuine" cures. Absolutely "incurable" tuberculosis, a "completely" smashed pelvis, two lame stretcher cases and other hopeless invalids were all thoroughly cured directly they either touched the Holy Coat or got a priest to touch it first and were touched by him afterwards. It seems incredible that such a marvellous relic should be hidden immediately after performing such staggering cures. Surely the world, must contain large numbers of fully-believing Catholics, lame and halt and blind, who could be made whole again and let loose to preach the undying faith? Why not let London have the Holy Coat for a year? We will guarantee 100,000 sick people could be found every day, all pious and all sick, ready for any miracle so long as it is a miracle. We have an idea, however, they have more faith in the average pill or medical treatment than in all the Holy Coats that could be worn in a thousand years.

Not only the "real" life of Christ, but the actual "portrait" of Our Lord is causing qualms in the theological world. A recent writer points out that in spite of the many biographies of Jesus, "none in any sense can be considered final." It is quite true. People are "fed-up" with a meek and lowly Jesus, a God who never smiles, who never works, and who insults those who don't agree with him. What they want is a robust Jesus, a Dictator, someone who could fly the Atlantic alone or score 2,000 runs and take 200 wickets in a season, or swim the Channel, or even break the Archer and Richards record. We venture to say that some such biography will be written one day, and it will be just as true as any other. Even if Jesus never did these things, it's some satisfaction to know that he could have done had he tried. As the Rev. "Dick" Sheppard said the other day, were another war in the making, and Jesus was here, he simply would not allow it to go on. Obviously he'd blow the combatants up on both sides with a holy bomb.

And as for portraits, it is difficult to see why such a devout Catholic as Mr. Frank Brangwyn should fail "to present in a satisfactory manner the figure of the Saviour." If all artists are "inspired," a little extra

praying on the part of Mr. Frank Brangwyn, a little more fingering of the beads, a few more consultations with priests or even a pilgrimage to the Pope, and a devout kissing of the holy toe ought to give any artist a vision of the real Jesus—especially as quite ordinary girls get personal visits from Our Lady regularly. Unfortunately, believers find the present "portraits" of Christ far from satisfying. Most of them look suspiciously like the portrait of Durer painted by himself, and in any case, are generally of a Saxon type of the sixteenth century. Jesus never appears as a dark-skinned typical Hebrew, which he ought to be if he ever lived. Still, we are sure a satisfactory portrait will one day be achieved, and it will have the distinction of being quite as good a likeness as any other. And that is some consolation in this hard and unbelieving world.

The Vicar of Brockenhurst, the Rev. W. A. Haslam, found himself, says the *Daily Mail*, in a railway carriage with card-sharpers. Being an amateur conjurer, he joined in, and after clearing the kitty of Ten Pounds, he delivered them a little homily and, we presume, gave them their money back. We don't think they deserved such leniency. Presumably, the Vicar was in uniform, in which case three-card tricksters should have known better than match their skill against a Trinitarian.

Fifty Years Ago.

MR. SPURGEON, speaking to the Protestant young men at Exeter Hall, wished them to remark Luther's hearty reverence for the holy scriptures. He did not inform them that the Saxon reformer rejected St. John's Apocalyptic nightmare as unauthentic; and that, finding St. James in blank contradiction to St. Paul on the subject of works *versus* faith—the one saying that by works a man is justified, and the other declaring the reverse—he set aside the brother of the Lord for the tent-maker of Tarsus, terming the epistle of St. James "*ein recht strohende epistel*" (a downright epistle of straw).

The precious book, however, became the stumbling-block of the Reformation. Protestantism stultified its principle of private judgment in making an alleged infallible book take the place of an alleged infallible church. The church is older than the Bible, but man is older, and is the maker of both. The Protestant Bible, indeed, rests upon the Catholic Church. Neither reason nor conscience would decide for excluding the ethical book of Ecclesiasticus and putting in the book of Esther, which has no relation either to morals or religion. Protestants must go to the Catholic fathers for such evidence as there is of the authenticity of their revelation. Moreover, the Bible is open to all the same objections of self-contradiction, and of being in opposition to reason and science as is the Church itself. The adoption of the Bible as the standard of Protestantism was the result of a compromise. It was thought to provide an answer to the objection that those who rejected the authority of the Pope were without any sufficient rule of faith. They forgot that an infallible book needs an infallible interpreter. Once admit the principle of private interpretation, and at once you make the Bible a nose of wax, as Luther well termed it.

The "Freethinker," November 18, 1883.

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THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL:

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- A. W. TINGLE.—Thank you.
 C.R.T.—Very useful; thank you.
 A. H. MILLWARD (Madrid).—Will use. Glad to hear from you.
 H. JAMESON.—If we had a private secretary or two, we might be able to do as you suggest, but it means very careful research, and we simply have not the time for it.
 TO ADVERTISING THE "FREETHINKER."—R. W. Cracklow, 21s. 4d.; W. Milroy, £1; H. Parkinson, 10s.
 R. MACQUEEN.—Obliged for paper. A large section of the population appears to be definitely in the pre-historic culture stage.
 A. KIRKHAM.—If the occasion itself presents itself we will write on Herbert Spencer. We have done so several times, but some years ago. Shall be used.
 W.C. (Manchester).—Your letter was probably delayed in the post, as it did not reach this office until Wednesday, the day after last week's paper went to press. We are glad to learn that Mr. Sam Cohen had such a good audience to listen to his address on "The Intellectual Crime of Christianity."
 J. BROADLY.—Shall be pleased to do anything we can to assist a revival of Freethinking activity in your town.
 A. HANSON (Shanghai).—Thanks. The sentiment is beautifully expressed.
 N. J. TURNER.—We sympathize very much with what you say, and will consult our printers on the matter.
 "GRATEFUL."—Received with thanks. We value the appreciation of one who has read the *Freethinker* for nearly 50 years.
 H. CRAWSHAY FROST.—Sorry considerations of space prevent our printing your letter till next week.
 A PARCEL containing New Zealand *Truthseekers* and several newspaper controversies has reached this office, but in the absence of any covering letter we do not know of the intentions or requirements of the sender.
 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 *Secular Society, Limited Office* is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.
 The *National Secular Society's Office* is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.
 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.
 Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen will to-day (November 19) lecture in the Central Hall, Derby, at 7 o'clock. This is Mr. Cohen's first visit to Derby for some years. A good meeting is anticipated. There will be reserved seats at sixpence and one shilling.

On Tuesday evening (November 21) Mr. Cohen will be holding a Debate at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, with Mr. Arnold Lunn. Subject, "That Science Discredits the Idea of God." Chair to be taken at seven o'clock.

On Sunday next (November 26) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Metropole, Hull, at 7.30. His subject will be "Things Christians Ought to Know." We believe there are plenty of Christians in Hull who ought to know much more than they do. We hope many of them will attend. Admission is free, but there are reserved seats at 6d. and 1s.

If it were possible to raise the issue, we have often wished that the prosecution in a blasphemy trial could have been forced to define just what sort of religion it was that had been blasphemed. For the only religion that has been established, and recognized by law, in this country, is the Church of England. Other religions are protected from blasphemy, we think, only because they have certain things in common with the Established Church. They are religious organizations that are recognized by the law, but only as organizations, and not in the sense that the Church of England is recognized and established. It is for that reason that we question whether a blasphemy action, since the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, would hold good in the Principality.

This point of view has been strengthened by a recent occurrence in Cornwall. Last December, in the Church of St. Hilary, as soon as the service began, a number of people arose and sang a hymn on their own account. The ground of their action was an objection to the form of the service then being carried on. Twelve people were summoned on the ground that they had interrupted "Divine Service." The defence was that this was not a Divine Service, as the rites carried on were not those of the Church of England. The magistrates upheld this view and the charges were dismissed. The essential ground of the magistrate's action was that "Divine Service" meant, legally, the Church of England service, as prescribed by the Prayer Book or by some lawful authority.

An appeal was lodged and the case came before Lord Hewart and Justices Avory and Lawrence. The decision of the magistrates was reversed, but it is noticeable that Mr. Justice Lawrence in delivering judgment said, that in the opinion of the court, "the words 'any divine service' covered all the services in the *Church of England*, including the celebration of the Sacrament." The qualification is significant. What the judges decided was that the celebration of the Sacrament must be taken as part of the Church of England services, so long, we presume, as it was not specifically forbidden. But it is also clear that if the disturbance of any religious service was an offence, then there would be no reason to qualify the judgment by saying that the Act forbidding disturbance in Church applied to all the Church of England services. That, we contend, upholds the position that the only religion, as such, which is protected by law in this country—not the only religion that wishes to be protected by law—is the Church of England. That was established by Government, and must be kept in being by the policeman, the judge and the prison.

Our elder readers will be glad to know that the health of Mr. W. Heaford, whose connexion with the Freethought movement as writer and speaker dates back over fifty years, is improving. He is not yet able to indulge in his favourite exercise of walking, but we hope for better news soon.

In *Freeman of Stamboul* (Gollancz), a book of travel and personal adventure, which is creating some stir at the moment, there occurs a mis-statement so gross as to mar any pleasure that might otherwise be derived from the volume. The writer speaks of the time when he was head-waiter (with subsidiary duties), at the Damascus Hotel, Jerusalem, where he met "all sorts of interesting people."

One of them was Colonel Ingersoll, the well-known Atheist. Ingersoll's comments on some of the places we visited would make very interesting reading, but they would take up too much space here. To some extent, he swallowed his own words later, at the obsequies of his brother in the United States, when he said, "If there be a God, I commend thy soul to him."

If we had only been treated to a few of the Ingersollian "comments," the offence might have been mitigated, though not forgiven. The address given at this brother's graveside did not, of course, contain such a phrase, nor anything of a remotely equivalent nature.

There was nothing said that was not harmonious with his general attitude on religion. Twenty years afterwards, Ingersoll delivered his last lecture on "What is Religion?" and in this very deliberately worded utterance there was no "swallowing" or recantation of any of the beliefs which had inspired his whole life-work. He made it impossible in that lecture for any honest man to give countenance to any of the usual post-mortem myths about recanting Freethinkers. The author is misinformed, but this, in a much-travelled and observant individual, is no excuse.

Next week we will give in full the address of Ingersoll at his brother's grave. This has been printed freely, even in the general press, for over 50 years, and, like everything of Ingersoll's, in replete with feeling, beauty and eloquence.

In spite of local armistice celebrations and fog Mr. Saphin had two excellent meetings in the Phoenix Theatre, Burnley, last Sunday. It was Mr. Saphin's first visit, and the local saints had worked hard to make it successful. The encouraging results sent all home in a happy frame of mind, and with new determination for the future.

The attention of South London Freethinkers is called to the course of Sunday evening lectures being held by the local Branch in the New Morris Hall, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham, S.W.4, at 7.30 p.m., to-day (November 19). Mr. G. F. Green will be the speaker. There is a library in connexion with the South London Branch N.S.S., and in one or two cases books borrowed have not been returned within the specified time. The local secretary asks those in possession of such books to kindly return them.

The Glasgow Secular Society reminds all local saints that Mr. R. H. Rosetti will speak in the McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, to-day (November 19) at 7 p.m., on "Nature, Man, and God." Also that a Social in connexion with the visit will take place on Saturday evening, November 18, in the D and F Rooms, Glasgow Cross, at 7.30. Tickets for the Social 2s. each, can be obtained from the local Secretary, Mrs. J. D. Macdonald, 149 Stanmore Road, Glasgow, S.2.

Catholic Merry England?

(Concluded from page 733.)

THE Catholic picture of a Golden Age, under an undivided and benevolent Catholic Church, is a pure myth. As Cotter Morison truly observes:—

Do we find, as a matter of fact, that the Ages of Faith were distinguished by a high morality? Were they superior in this respect to the present age, which is nearly on all hands acknowledged not to be an age of Faith? The answer must be in the negative. Taking them broadly, the Ages of Faith were emphatically ages of crime, of gross and scandalous wickedness, of cruelty, and, in a word, of immorality. And it is noteworthy that in proportion as we recede backward from the present age, and return into the Ages of Faith, we find that the crime and the sin become denser and blacker.³

A study of Dean Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*, Hallam's *Middle Ages*, Robertson's view of the Middle Ages, contained in his *History of Charles V.*, and Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, will show that Morison was only stating the simple truth. It will be noted also that none of the above historians was an unbeliever; indeed, three of them were in holy orders. We have not cited Gibbon, as he was an unbeliever; nevertheless, his great history of the *Decline and Fall of Roman Empire*, gives the same picture of the ignorance, superstition, barbarity and filth of the Middle Ages recorded by the others.

³ Cotter Morison: *The Service of Man*. p. 88.

The proof of these things, provided by the clergy of those times themselves, can now be read in the two books compiled from the sermons preached during the Middle Ages. They abound in passages denouncing the vice and immorality, not only of the mass of the people, but of the Monks and Friars themselves. "Their testimony is abundant to the callous and selfish indifference of an age as greedy and calculating as ours, which well-nigh a thousand years of Catholic Christianity had failed to eradicate."⁴ "To do adequate justice," says Mr. Owst, "to that great monument of Dominican preaching, the *Summa* of John Bromyard, in respect of its Complaint and Satire against the clergy, would require the space of a volume. From the papacy itself down to the newly-fledged incumbent he indicts the whole hierarchical edifice from its topmost pinnacle to its humblest supports." (p. 247.) And we have every reason to believe, continues Mr. Owst, that Bromyard presents us with the gathered fruit of Mendicant preaching in England during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries.

Bromyard complains of "prelates and clergy who consume the goods of the Church that are owed to the poor upon illicit uses, namely, on prostitutes, actors and relations, to enrich them out of the patrimony of Christ," while they themselves "celebrate scarce once a year, or never at all." (p. 258.) In no profession, he declares:—

is there to be found so putrid a section, so many damned of any status as there are of damnable clergy. The evidence of this damnation lies in the fact that not only does their own sin involve themselves, but it is also a cause of damnation to others. For, if now any reprove the people for lechery, usury, drunkenness or any vice whatever, immediately they hold up some one of the clergy as a shield of excuse for their conduct. Wherefore, it would seem to follow that the infamy of the clergy is more harmful than their sin. . . .⁵

Some of the pastors, we are informed: "more readily lead hounds and falcons to the chase than Christians to devotion: and what is worse, lead more flocks to the Devil by their wicked conduct and example than to God by preaching or holiness of life. . . . More do they abound in eatings and drinkings than do lay-people as a rule, and they are more given up to idleness."⁶

If we turn to the Franciscans and take typical representative Friars, Staunton and Bozen in the early fourteenth century, and Friar Nicholas Philip, a hundred years later, says our author, "we shall find the same tradition maintained in much the same language."

The Biblical injunction, as to the use of the rod in training the child, was acted upon throughout the Middle Ages. A warning to parents, says Mr. Owst, is given in the quatrain:—

Chasten well your children, while they be young,
Of work, of deed, of speech, of tongue:
For if ye let them be too bold
They will you grieve when they be old.⁶

In his later work, Mr. Owst quotes a passage of a kind that appears in more than one collection, as follows: "The property [disposition] of a young child is such that he can not be maliciously disposed, or bear rancour or wrath to those that beat him ever so sore, as it falleth for a child to have due chastising."⁷ It was considered to be a necessary part of a child's training to be well beaten.

⁴ Owst: *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*. p. 522.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 259.

⁶ Owst: *Preaching in Medieval England*. p. 272. We have rendered the quotations into modern English.

⁷ Owst: *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*. p. 34.

The low view of women held by the early Christians, was maintained throughout the Middle Ages. The remarks of the Dominican Humbertus de Romanis, says Mr. Owst, depict, "the general attitude of contemporary preachers toward the opposite sex. Women must be excluded from the pulpits, he says, first, because they lack sufficient intelligence; secondly, because an inferior rôle in life has been given them by God; thirdly, because in such a position they would provoke immorality; fourthly, owing to the folly of the first woman, Eve, who, as St. Bernard pointed out, by opening her mouth on a certain occasion, brought ruin to the whole world."⁸ There is, however, a record of one woman who scored off a preacher, for when one angry Friar publicly rebuked, from the pulpit, a woman he saw talking, he was met by the staggering retort, "Who babbleth most of us both? For I do but whisper a word with my neighbour here, and thou hast babbled there all this hour."

The ascetic ideal of the early Christians, the praise of virginity and hatred of sex, continued to be the Christian teaching, whatever the practice might be. No doubt the attempt to live up to an impossible standard, with the inevitable breakdown in most cases, was responsible for much of the prevailing immorality. As Mr. Owst remarks:—

Where healthy human nature seems to demand some positive doctrine of sexual happiness, they speak only, as in the realm of public affairs, of sin and temptation, of forbidden pleasures and lusts, of needful fears and repressions, haunted by the same old shadow of Original Sin, the same primitive ascetical ideals as their ancestors. Woman's chief glory—not merely her little foibles and excesses—is by them accounted a snare and a delusion, her greatest field of activity little better than a wilderness of briars and pitfalls. "Woman," says our thirteenth-century author of the *Speculum Laicorum*, quoting Vincent of Beauvais, "as saith Secundus, the philosopher, is the confusion of Man, an insatiable beast, a continual anxiety, an incessant warfare, a daily ruin, a house of tempest, a hindrance to devotion." . . . In no sphere, perhaps, does the sheer, overwhelming pessimism of the pulpit show itself more clearly than in its treatment of the theme of matrimony.⁹

The two books are a quarry, a mine, of Medieval lore and are well worth study.

W. MANN.

⁸ Owst: *Preaching in Medieval England*. p. 5.

⁹ Owst: *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*. pp. 377-378.

Annie Besant and Religion.

(Continued from page 739.)

III.

BRADLAUGH'S great influence on Mrs. Besant can be traced in the pages of the *National Reformer*, to which she began contributing, and to which she became the sub-editor. Her beauty and brains, and her extraordinary oratory, were wonderful assets to the Freethought Party. It was not long, however, before she realized a certain section insisted upon her saying something about the economic question. Bradlaugh's famous debate with Hyndman on Socialism made her look into that subject more carefully, and her meetings with Dr. Aveling and Mr. G. Bernard Shaw diverted her attention a little from pure Secularism on to the path of Socialism. It must have been a sad day for Bradlaugh when he recognized how their ideas on this subject diverged, but he was a complete Freethinker. If she felt that the economic Gospel was

Socialism, she had a perfect right to express her views, and never for a moment did he try to prevent her. Just as she had mastered the terminology of Atheism, so in turn she mastered that of Socialism. Her well-known debate with G. W. Foote, in 1886, on "Is Socialism Sound?" shows again her remarkable grasp of her subject, and it was only because she met in Foote one with a keener brain, and one who had done also a good deal of analytical thinking on his own account, that she did not, so to speak, romp home.

Ten years before that, however, occurred the memorable Knowlton trial, in which, side by side with Bradlaugh, she upheld the right of poor people to read a book on Birth-Control. It is one of the most significant trials in history, and the speech she made in the court proves again how magnificently she could assimilate almost any subject. Malthusianism is not an easy question, but she handled her points with extraordinary care, and made, in my own opinion, the greatest speech of her career.

Yet with all these other movements, her interest in religion never flagged. She realized that, in spite of his other activities, Bradlaugh's heart was with his Freethought. He never was happier than in debate or on religion, when he could expound either his philosophy in defence of Atheism, or his remarkable knowledge of the Bible and kindred subjects. She wrote the second part of the *Freethinker's Text Book*, dealing entirely with Christianity and its evidences, etc. In this she epitomized the conclusions she found in many Freethought works, drawing freely on Robert Taylor, E. P. Meredith, W. R. Cassels, Dr. Giles, and many others, and drawing freely also on their authorities. It is in its way an excellent text-book, and could still be used, as many of its conclusions are only slightly modified by modern research. The fact is that the older Freethinkers did their work so thoroughly (in a limited field, if you like) that modern research has done far more to confirm than to rebut them. Mrs. Besant had many debates also, some in public, and others in the pages of the *National Reformer*. In these she was always the confirmed Atheist, and no one could possibly suppose—as she afterwards insisted—that all the time her mind was torn between doubts of her position, and that she never was satisfied with the materialistic philosophy. Her position was stated over and over again with all the vigour of which she was capable, and can be found in the collection published in 1888, under the general title of *Theological Essays and Debates*. It is a remarkable volume, and shows her at the full maturity of her powers as a Freethinker. She never seems to have had difficulty in finding a subject, or, having found one, in writing about it with astonishing facility and knowledge. The essay on *Roots of Christianity*, published in 1886, is packed with the kind of reading found in Higgins' *Anacalypsis*—that massive repository of ancient beliefs and legends—and it was perhaps in writing this that she first discovered the real import of "Christianity before Christ," the "Divine Wisdom" of the Ancients, the symbols which primitive man associated with the "mysteries" foisted upon him and exploited by the self-appointed priest. Perhaps I am wrong in saying the real import; for the knowledge acquired in writing this particular pamphlet was to stand her in good stead when, only three or four years later, she reviewed Mme. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, and set out at once on the high road to Theosophy. But at the time she still insisted upon complete disbelief. She still wrote that she was an Atheist. *Why I do not Believe in God* was published in 1887. It is clear that then she certainly did not believe in God; and it is clear also that she was

still using Bradlaugh's arguments; of course, à la Besant. Her conclusion in this pamphlet is:—

I do not believe in God. My mind finds no ground on which to build up a reasonable faith. My heart revolts against the spectre of an Almighty Indifference to the pain of sentient beings. My conscience rebels against the injustice, the cruelty, the inequality, which surround me on every side. But I believe in man. In man's redeeming power; in man's remoulding energy; in man's approaching triumph through knowledge, love and work.

Yes, she believed in Secularism when, again and again, she expounded it in speech and writing. She enthusiastically extolled it on the platform and with her pen. But with one gesture she threw it away, and all she had hitherto stood for, for the incredible and mystical teachings of the Blavatsky—Olcott—made Theosophy, a hotch-potch of primitive beliefs, superstition and credulity. Let us see whither it led her.

Throughout the volume of *Essays and Debates*, dated 1888, there cannot be found (as far as I have read) a trace of hesitation as to the truth of Free-thought. No one is more boldly confident than Annie Besant. In debates and lecturing she confirms her faith in Atheism over and over again, and it is difficult even now to understand her almost complete *volte-face*. We may write as if we do, we may linger over the changes of those fifteen years of struggle and conquest in the world of thought, when, side by side with Charles Bradlaugh, she took her part as a soldier and a leader of advanced and liberal ideas, ready to endure and suffer for the causes she loved best, and fought for so ardently. She seemed the embodiment of clear and logical thinking. No subject seemed too difficult for her to master. Her pen and her word were as fluent as ever, and there was neither slackening nor weakening in her thought.

Yet Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, figuratively speaking, bowled her over. She seemed aghast at these ponderous tomes packed with "mystical" and occult references, bewildering in their variety and knowledge. Here was the real key to religion that baffled Annie Besant in its multifarious forms, in its strange and unknown origins. Here was the explanation of the creeds and the practices of millions of worshippers of all countries, races, and colours. If religion was untrue, as she had so vehemently asserted hundreds of times, how was it so many people could still be found to defend it, to worship and adore the God she denied? Could she be wrong for once?—or right as far as outward forms and ceremonies are concerned, but wrong because she had never troubled herself with the esoteric side, the symbolic and hidden meanings, in short, the Secret Doctrine? How was it she did not know this Secret Doctrine? How was it possible that another woman could write so fully, so masterfully, on a subject of which she herself hardly knew the A.B.C.?

I suspect something like this must have filled Mrs. Besant's mind as she turned over the pages of *The Secret Doctrine*. In the review she wrote of it for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, she ended by saying, "of the truth in it our superficial examination is insufficient to decide." But six weeks or so later, in 1889, she became a member of the Theosophical Society, and, for good or ill, she belonged to it for the rest of her life.

It was not long after that, that G. W. Foote wrote one of his most masterly pamphlets. Foote was almost always masterly, and a pamphlet provided an ideal medium for the diffusion of his ideas. Justice will be done one day to Foote, and the future historian will wonder why it has been so tardy in recognizing

his brilliance as a writer, and as a propagandist of advanced thought. In *Mrs. Besant's Theosophy* he sounded the attack and provided a criticism devastating in its accuracy. I am sure it almost undid the whole of her popularity with the Free-thought Party. He did not like writing it. He hated to attack a woman, and such a woman as Mrs. Besant. But he felt he had a duty to perform, and he had not the sentimental chivalry felt by Bradlaugh for the comrade working by his side. If Mrs. Besant was a Free-thinker and a Secularist she had no business to join the Theosophical Party, and he told her so bluntly, and with an acuteness which she resented as much as she resented the annihilating pamphlet W. P. Ball wrote against her Socialism. She replied to Foote in a 30-page pamphlet entitled *Why I Became a Theosophist*—published, strangely enough, by the Free-thought Publishing Co.

"Growth," she declares in her opening words, "necessarily implies change, and provided the change be sequential and of the nature of development, it is but the sign of intellectual life." She had changed because she had grown. She had increased in her intellectual life, and, step by step, she attempts to demolish Foote and explain the marvels of Theosophy. Atheism was right on its negative side, but it did not explain Mind or Life or Thought. She had tried for ten years to find the explanation as given by Atheism, and there was none. She found the riddles posed by psychology equally unanswered. "How," she asks, "does the Materialist explain the phenomena of Memory?" He gives no answer, and so she insists upon the study of the abnormal as well as the normal. The phenomena of clairvoyance, clairaudience and thought transference have suddenly become facts in her life. She believes everything she is told of mesmerism and hypnotism, and she challenges the Materialist to explain dreams. What a change from Annie Besant, Atheist, to Annie Besant, Fellow of the Theosophical Society!

On the question of God she felt that Atheists and Agnostics could join the Society with perfect equanimity and pointed out that Mme. Blavatsky said there was nothing even to prevent Bradlaugh from joining. There was no "personal" God, but a God that was All just as All was God. Theosophy was pure Pantheism. But there were Masters or Mahatmas or Great Souls who were teachers, and "who because they know, can do things that ignorant people cannot do." And suddenly Mrs. Besant jumps into the well-known Theosophical terminology. She was mastering it quite as easily as she mastered that of religion, of Atheism, of Malthusianism, and of Socialism. We are in the midst of a jargon which looks more impressive because it is written in Hindu words. Atma and Buddhi, Manas and Kamarupa, Prana and Linga Sharira and Rupa are all hurled at us. We get to know what the "Higher Triad" is, and the "lower Quarternary," Astral appearance and Higher Self, Karma, the Ego and re-incarnation, and we are in the midst of a world as far from Secularism and Free-thought, and all Mrs. Besant had previously fought and worked for, as it is possible to imagine. Yet she implored the members of the N.S.S. never to forget "she tried to follow truth"!

Foote had little difficulty in demolishing this farrago in his famous rejoinder *Secularism and Theosophy*, and he also replied to Madame Blavatsky. This lady was particularly angry with him, and wrote *The Ther-sites of Free-thought*. Foote replied in *The New Cagliostro*, and I think Mme. Blavatsky then felt discretion was the better part of valour. One would dearly like to know how H.P.B. and A.B. referred to

Foote in private. He had hurt them both in the intellectual combat, and reading all these pamphlets again after many years, I cannot help but feel that Foote had won, not merely in the battle of wits, not merely a dialectical victory, but one of sheer, sturdy common sense.

H. CUTNER.

(To be concluded.)

Those Infidel Death-beds.

ALMOST the first stock argument I ever heard in proof of the truth of Christianity was the terrible scene surrounding the bed of the dying "infidel." It was always an impressive argument. Choking back the tears of sorrow and regret that such things could happen, the fervid Christian would produce "Tom" Paine, the blasphemer, Voltaire, the mocking sceptic or Bradlaugh, the hardened Atheist and recount the harrowing details of their deaths. How different was the quiet scene surrounding the loving exit of all thorough believers! Paine, shrieking for whisky with one hand and cursing Jesus with the other—what an example for young people who may be inclined ever so little towards blasphemous infidelity! And the picture was never complete without its contrast, angels surrounding good little Willie, and weeping Papa and Mama and numerous brothers and sisters and relatives and servants—the old white-haired butler was never omitted—all on their knees, and a big imaginary Cross all ready to waft the dying child straight into the arms of his Lord and Saviour!

Tracts with stories such as these used to pour into our home, but as I grew older I never could see the relevancy of the argument. Religion was true or it was not, and neither the awful death of poor Paine (as I used to believe it was) nor the wonderful death of little Willie could, it seemed to me, make any difference.

Yet Christians are still using the same old argument. I still hear it, in season and out of season. "Ah, my boy," they say, "Wait till *you* are on your death-bed and then you'll see!" And I am still expected to be impressed with the horror of the death-bed scenes of Voltaire, Bradlaugh and Paine.

It is difficult often to refute, at the time, the statements of the dear Christians, statements which many of them know to be lies. One wants the facts, the authorities and so on, and with every good will in the world it is not always easy to remember the precise details of an "infidel" death-bed. Thus it was a happy idea of G. W. Foote to compile a list of the principal ones, and with unassailable authorities give the lie direct to the mendacious Christian tracts and speakers who retailed the absurd stories.

The first edition of *Infidel Death-beds* was published in 1886—it grew out of a smaller pamphlet under a different title—a second edition was called for later, and now* a third edition has been published, well bound, clearly printed and revised and enlarged by A. D. McLaren. No fewer than 82 "infidels" are dealt with in Part I., and in addition, in Part II., are three well-written chapters by Mr. McLaren, and a fourth giving an account of some Christian death-beds.

Foote's work has been long out of print, and it was constantly being asked for. It gave briefly and clearly the *truth* of the deaths of almost all those Free-

thinkers about whom was heard the rubbish Christians put forward as truth. No one was more adept at scotching a good Christian lie than G. W. Foote—witness, for example, the way he dealt with the Rev. H. Price Hughes. He made short but sharp work of the impudent and lying "infidel" death-bed stories of Paine and Voltaire. Where the details required lengthy narration, it was given; in other cases, a short summary of the facts was all that was necessary. In addition, precise biographical references are given from the best authorities available.

Mr. McLaren has added a number of names, Free-thinkers who were omitted in the previous edition, and some who have died since it was published. He has worthily followed Foote, and readers will be indebted to him for the inclusion of Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, Conway, Ferrer, George Meredith, Holyoake and many others, including G. W. Foote himself. Then the three special chapters on "How the Ancients Viewed Death," "The Christian View of Death," "The Free-thinker's Attitude to Death," form excellent summaries of their subjects, while Christians will certainly not like having the tables turned on themselves with the twelve Christian death-beds Mr. McLaren has chosen. They are all, of course, fully documented. It is my sincere opinion that Freethinkers should know the *truth* about "Infidel" death-beds—and, indeed, also something more about the great Infidels than merely their names, or that they died at some time or other. Here then is the book for them. It can be picked up at any time, opened at any page, and found not only of absorbing interest, but full of vital information.

But I have left to the last, reference to one of the best things in the book—Foote's fine Introduction. He rarely touched a thing but he graced it. Here he gives the *raison d'être* of the book in his own magical, sparkling style. Hard writing, it is said, makes easy reading. Foote had the exquisite gift of style. He probably did not find writing difficult, but reading him makes you ask, like poor Oliver Twist, for more. That is one reason why you will like *Infidel Death-Beds*.

H. CUTNER.

A War-time Incident.

A CASUALTY clearing station handling English Tommies mostly, and run by an English staff. It is a two-hours' wait for me and the ambulances are pouring in laden with mangled smashed humanity. It is a huge marquee, and the patients are handled quickly. Before I am there ten minutes eight men are carried out for burial. One man with his head bandaged; as the Doctor removes the bandage, he removes a portion of the brain with it. A few minutes later the man is carried out. He makes number nine. Another man with part of his scalp removed and one eye almost hanging out. In the operating theatre the awful rasping of the surgeon's saw—a man's leg is being amputated. On the floor is a pile; they are actually too busy to remove them yet; there are several other arms and legs in that pile. In the outer portion of the tent are scores of men on stretchers, all waiting their turn. They are wonderfully quiet and patient. An occasional moan or groan—that is all. Here is an army chaplain handing round cigarettes and cups of tea, and talking to those who are well enough to talk. I listen to what the follower of the lowly Nazarene has to say to these men. He says to a man near me, "Cheer up my boy. It will soon be over now. Fritz is everywhere retiring, and I heard this morning that our artillery have done *splendid work*."

CRITICUS.

* *Infidel Death-beds*, by G. W. Foote and A. D. McLaren. 2s. net. The Pioneer Press.

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