

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

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

Views and Opinions.

The B.B.C. Exposure

AS I feared, I am interrupting the series of articles I began a fortnight ago in order to deal with another matter that can hardly be put off, if it is to be dealt with at all. Readers will remember that ever since the B.B.C. began its "doped" broadcasts, which means immediately after the Corporation began to operate, I have, both behind the scenes and in these columns, protested against its policy of censorship and boycott, and I may now say that I went to considerable trouble in instigating protests from many parts of the country. I kept this up until the feeling against the B.B.C. was able to take care of itself. Now, as the world knows, a sensational protest has been made by a working-man, who was asked to give an address, as one of a series on "Modern Industry and National Character." Mr. Ferrie, the speaker in question, submitted his speech, which was duly corrected and revised. He submitted to the "cuts." But when he came to deliver the speech he found that it had been still further cut, and to such an extent as to make it a travesty of what he wished to say. Mr. Ferrie might have simply refused to speak, and in that case the B.B.C. with, its customary trickiness, would have merely said that there had been an interruption, or that the speech would not be given, and there the matter would have ended. Mr. Ferrie took a wiser course. He said nothing until he stood before the microphone, and then he managed to make a very straight, but strong protest against the doping of the public by the B.B.C. before there was any chance of cutting him off. It must be borne in mind that even after the paper to be read has been revised to suit the B.B.C., an official follows the reading, prepared to cut off the speaker should he be daring enough to say anything on his own. I say, his own, because when a paper has been revised by a censorship it ceases to belong to the speaker; it belongs to his censors.

The Hand of the Censor

Fortunately, Mr. Ferrie took the course he did. Fortunately, also, he gave to the *News-Chronicle* a copy of his original paper, which was published in the issue of that newspaper for March 6. I would like my readers to get a copy of the paper, still better would it be if the *News-Chronicle* would publish the address as a pamphlet, to illustrate what the B.B.C. thinks the public ought not to hear, as part of a course intended to deal with a subject from all points of view. Those who have read it already, will agree that there was not a passage that would have been excluded by an ordinary Pleasant Sunday Afternoon meeting. Here are two specimen passages which were among those cut out by this Government-made monopoly:—

The workers are being continually asked to sacrifice in the interests of the nation. But as one eminent Tory statesman of the last century pointed out, there are two nations—the rich and the poor. My workmates say that equal sacrifice, the maintenance of British prestige, and the perpetual pointing to the corner which we are forever supposed to be turning, means for us harder work for less wages, the prospect of unemployment, starvation and degradation. We see the feverish preparations for war over the world, we see the wave of Fascist terror sweeping over Europe. We see the forces of Fascism here in this country. On the other hand, we see in Soviet Russia the seven-hour day, wages doubled in five years, and greater facilities for education and culture. Dissatisfaction with our lot is growing.

While production has been increased, wages have been reduced, and the numbers of workers employed have fallen. My trade union, on a reduced membership, has shown an increase of unemployed from 17 per cent in 1931 to 23.96 in 1933. Many of my mates say, and justly, "We are not responsible for the economic chaos which exists. We do not own or control the means of production." Am I and my mates blind to the fact that while workers go short of food, clothing and good houses and other necessities, food is being burned, thrown into the sea or used as manure? Do you not think that such cases as that of the working woman in Hampstead who committed suicide because of starvation and her futile efforts to feed her family must make a profound impression upon the British working-classes?

I do not think anyone, outside the small gang of B.B.C. censors, would say that there is anything here that ought not to be included in a series of lectures which professed to give all points of view. I have not come across a single paper that has supported the B.B.C. in its action; most of them have strongly condemned it, and the *Church Times*, not a paper given to extreme views, says of the address:—

It is a moderate expression of Socialist belief, with some of which we agree, and with some of which we profoundly disagree. It seems to us much to be regretted that Mr. Ferrie should have been prevented

from broadcasting a point of view, which for good or ill, is shared by tens of thousands of his fellows.

Mr. Oliver Baldwin, one of the staff of the B.B.C. broadcasters, has delivered a very strong attack on the "Prussianism" of the B.B.C., and has explained how the staff must stand to attention whenever Sir John Reith makes his appearance. But he has recently signed another three months contract, and explains that "I naturally want to earn a few coppers while I can." But if men will sell their personal honour for the sake of a few coppers, or a few guineas, or for the sake of getting their names known among the general public, it is not likely that they will give the cause of real reform much help. Reformers should be made of sterner and better stuff. Mr. Baldwin says that the only hope of salvation for the B.B.C. staff is a trade union. Ridiculous! A trade union might diminish a little of the autocracy of that narrow-minded parson's cats-paw, Sir John Reith. But how will that prevent the doping of the public through the microphone? If the B.B.C. staff wishes to be treated like *men*, they must aim at something more than a little less "Prussianism" as regards their own treatment. They will have to become part of a movement that will make the broadcasts a reflex of all shades of opinion on every subject that is discussed. There is needed a body of speakers with a greater sense of their own dignity, a keener sense of duty towards the public, and a refusal to take any part in what is a scarcely concealed endeavour to mislead the public as far as it is possible to do so.

* * *

The Hidden Hand

As we said last week, the B.B.C. represents one of the most cowardly, and one of the most demoralizing forms of censorship that can exist. In the case of such a monstrosity as the Hitlerite regime the stupid intolerance is open, and submission by those living under it may be excused. There is no degradation in submission to open and overwhelming force. But the B.B.C. censorship is not of that kind. It proclaims that it wishes to educate the people, and it invites, so it says, people representing *different* points of view to speak. Only a few weeks ago in reply to a criticism from an American Broadcasting Association, it told the slimy lie that what it does is to advise speakers how to prepare their speech, and "suggests" methods of doing so, but said nothing of its policy of excising passages in the manner shown by the Ferrie incident; and when it said that it invited discussion from "different" points of view, it clearly intended the public to take "different" as the equivalent of "all" points of view. Not often are the falsehoods it publishes open falsehoods; usually they have just that modicum of possible truth in them that may save the religious conscience of Sir John Reith. The B.B.C. does not always tell you a straightforward lie; it tells a truth in a way that produces all the consequences of a lie, but which saves the face of those who state it. It is the method of the unscrupulous politician, and of the worst type of religious bigot.

Such a system demoralizes all round. It mis-educates the public, and it demoralizes all who work under it. Mr. Oliver Baldwin and others have pointed out, since the Ferrie affair, that the B.B.C. is dominated by Sir John Reith, a retired Colonel of the Guards, and a retired Admiral. Who on earth are this trio to set themselves up as censors? Sir John Reith is the son of a parson, with a very ordinary education; he has never been anything but an engineer, or connected with other than engineering jobs. He has had several Government appointments, but is without the slightest claim to intellectual eminence

in any direction whatever. And the retired Colonel and Admiral are, so far as I can discover, just a retired Colonel and Admiral. I am not surprised that Mr. Baldwin and others complain that the whole atmosphere of Broadcast headquarters is that of the quarter deck or the parade square. Neither in the Army nor in the Navy is it the custom to treat human beings as responsible persons, able to make up their own minds on the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. The ordinary man cannot be prevented receiving literature of any kind that is not distinctly prohibited by the ordinary law. But the man in the Army or in the Navy must be protected by special legislation from being given reading matter which the man out of the services may be given at any time and anywhere. I am not surprised that with an admiral, a colonel and a religious bigot in charge, the atmosphere of the parade ground and the quarter deck should obtain, but, thanks to the religious element introduced, lacking the straightforward autocracy of both.

* * *

What May be Done

I say that this system demoralizes all round. Speakers, with rare exceptions, submit to a censorship from which every man with intellectual self-respect should revolt. A control exercised by men who are experts in the departments in which they operate, and who are genuinely anxious to present the public with opinions on a given subject from *all* points of view, might be of service, but a censorship of a bundle of intellectual nobodies, to whom a speaker is just another man who is temporarily under their command is simply intolerable. And because this censorship is not avowed, those who yield to it are transformed into its apologists, and even help in its operations. If they wish to be asked to speak they know that the paper they submit must contain nothing to which these self-appointed censors will object. So they do the censoring before the paper is submitted, crossing out this, and toning down that. Then they explain that their speech has not been altered. They are made apologists for the insult that has been offered them, and smooth the operations of a damnable system by so acting that they are made part and parcel of it. Is it worth while for the sake of a few guineas per lecture, or for the sake of a little temporary publicity, so to sacrifice one's sense of self-respect?

I think we can all welcome the case of Mr. Ferrie. He has done far more good than he could possibly have done had he been permitted to deliver his lecture in the ordinary way. The working-man has shown the way. Now we shall see how many of the non-working class who figure before the microphone will follow his example. It is idle for them to rationalize their action by pleading, "We have got to do the best we can to get over to the public?" If they stood on one side, and let their standing aside be known, and the reason for it, it would not be long before the intolerance and impudence of this Christian-Naval-Military combination would be broken down. One or two have made this stand, and in some of the cases the B.B.C. has been compelled to give way. But if the B.B.C. speakers will not stand out for the elementary right of freedom of thought and speech, then the public should be able to realize that whatever they are listening to is not the opinion of the speaker, it is what the censorship agrees he may express. What is being broadcast is what the B.B.C. thinks the public may be permitted to know. And a public that submits tamely to this, must not complain if it finds a Fascist or some other dictatorship established. They will have helped to create it.

But if the speakers will *not* sacrifice their guineas or their desire for publicity to the cause of freedom of speech, then the general public may do something to save these teachers from their own mis-teaching. The time is approaching when the B.B.C. Charter will come up for renewal. Let the public keep this agitation alive. Let them make it quite plain that it knows that what is coming over the wireless, when it is not concerned with purely scientific matter—and not always even then—is doped matter, that they may listen only to what the Admiral and the Colonel and a pious Engineer, or similar casual odds-and-ends think they ought to receive. If this agitation is kept alive, if the press is bombarded with letters, if speakers take every opportunity of adding their mite, if the agitation succeeds in inducing other speakers to imitate the action of Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Ferrie, and to make it public why they do not speak, then when the Charter again comes before Parliament it may be that events will show that the desire for freedom of thought and speech in Britain is not yet dead.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Shelley's Atheism

"Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever!"
Browning.

"His eyes be like the starry lights,
His voice like sounds of summer nights.
In all his lovely mien let pierce
The magic of the universe."—Arnold.

It is astonishing how scared so many people are at the mere mention of the word, "Atheism." They seem to say, or shout, "Come in any shape but that!" Bernard Shaw has told us that at a meeting of the Shelley Society he himself stressed the great poet's Atheistic opinions, and, to quote his own words, "nearly broke the Society up on the spot." Critics of Shelley have, for the most part, been just as squeamish as young curates concerning his well-known iconoclasm. Professor Henry Morley, for example, used to moan that poor Shelley was a Christian all his life without realizing it. Another critic sobbed that if Shelley had lived to be an octogenarian he might have finished as a churchwarden or a Sunday-school teacher. Even Matthew Arnold, who should have known better, regarded Shelley as a "beautiful but ineffectual angel, beating his wings in the void in vain." Personally, I have always wished that Shelley might have lived to be of the alleged age of the Old Testament patriarchs, so that he could have replied to these detractors. Even in the pages of so sober a journal as the *Freethinker*, a correspondent, posing as Alice in Wonderland, wants proofs that Shelley was an Atheist at a time when his poems are in every library and many homes. As this critic imagines that Charles Dickens was a hard-boiled Churchman and Trinitarian, his thirst for knowledge is to be more commended than his acquaintanceship with the thought of both Dickens and Shelley.

Take the case of Shelley. During his unpopular years no one disputed his Atheism, but the moment that it was discerned that he was a really great poet many parsons began to camouflage his opinions on religion. Apparently, the only Christian body that did not claim Shelley as being a very religious man were the Chinese Presbyterians, maybe because his works had not been translated into that ancient language.

Christians, and fancy religionists, cannot escape from the facts. Shelley was expelled from Oxford University for publishing a pamphlet entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*. His Atheistic poem, *Queen Mab*, with its extensive explanatory prose notes, was

not only declared blasphemous by Courts of Law, but numbers of men and women were actually fined and imprisoned for selling it. Next to Paine's *Age of Reason*, this book was the most prosecuted publication of the nineteenth century. Shelley's open letter to Judge Ellenborough concerning the prosecution of Daniel Isaac Eaton for blasphemy loses all meaning if the writer were not a militant Freethinker. Shelley himself escaped imprisonment for blasphemy by flying from England. He was, however, deprived of the custody of his own children on account of his known Atheism, and the bare fact that they were put by the Court into the care of a clergyman's family is a sufficient comment, if it were needed. Finally, there is Shelley's own testimony. There is plenty of Atheism in his writings, both in prose and verse, and in one of his conversations with Captain Trelawny in the last year of his life, he said explicitly that, although he regarded his *Queen Mab* as crude, he agreed with its substance, and that he took up the title of Atheist as a gage of battle with the Christians.

What more should a fair-minded man want in the way of evidence? When Christians are driven into a corner, and are forced to admit Shelley's Freethought, they pretend that his iconoclastic views were confined to his earlier years. Admittedly, Shelley was young, but he died young. He was but twenty-nine years' old when he was drowned in the Gulf of Spezzia; and his death, as George Foote has pointed out, was "the heaviest loss that English literature has ever sustained." Shelley's poem, "Julian and Maddalo," was not an early work. It was written in Italy towards the close of his life, and reflects his close friendship with Byron. In the poem he makes Byron, whom he calls "Count Maddalo," address to him the words:—

"You were ever still,
Among Christ's flock a perilous infidel,
A wolf for the meek lambs."

In a poem he wrote on leaving England, with his infant son, William, Shelley refers to "the priests of the bloody faith." The glorious speech which ends the third act of his masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*, describes "thrones, altars, judgment seats, and prisons," as part of the present system of misrule. Indeed, Freethought is the keynote of Shelley's genius, and his poetry, be it remembered, is one of the glories of a thousand years of English literature. Because of Shelley's known Atheism, society gave the young poet a bad name, and would gladly have imprisoned him. When he was in a post office at Pisa, a ruffian called him "a damned Atheist," and knocked him down. That has always been the Christian method of dealing with opponents, and is so still, in those places where faith is strong. Shelley had to put up with much suffering for proclaiming his Freethought. Shortly before his untimely end, he remarked to his friend, Captain Trelawny, "I am ninety," meaning that he had lived and felt so intensely that he felt far older than his actual years. Nor was it an idle boast, for he was himself the "Julian" of his own poem:

"Me, who am as a nerve o'er which do creep
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth."

Shelley was the poet of Revolution. On his birthday, August 4, 1792, it was decreed by the French National Assembly that Louis XVI. was no longer King of France. On the same day the Emperor of Germany and the King of Prussia declared their opposition to the Revolution. Nor is this all, for Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother of Shelley's Mary, had just published her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Shelley's own generation hated him, reviled him, but his genius made its way, and to-day visitors to Rome make pilgrimage to his tomb beside

the Pauline Gate at the opening of the Ossian Way. It is a public confession that the great Freethought poet confers glory upon the Eternal City, and that it is made more honourable and illustrious by his memorial. Indeed, Shelley's whole career is a most eloquent testimony that reformers, no less than poets, are, to borrow his own striking phrase, "the unacknowledged legislators of mankind."

"What good is like to this,
To do worthy the writing, and to write
Worthy the reading, and the world's delight?"

MIMNERMUS.

My Search for Proof

WHEN I was a young man I possessed one ambition of which every religious person would approve. This ambition was to convince all my non-religious acquaintances of the existence of God. In my own mind there were no doubts about the matter. I had been taught it as a child. All my relatives seemed certain about it. Every clergyman I listened to declared that it was the first and most important truth in religion. I had never heard or read any serious arguments against the belief. In fact, the existence of God was for me a fact which seemed so indisputable that I could not account for disbelief except on the grounds of indifference or ignorance. Incidentally, this explanation was also taught me as a child.

In addition to this I was convinced that it was impossible to live an upright and moral life without a belief in God. For me, God was religion, and religion was morality. All my relatives said so. Every clergyman said so. And although I might sometimes doubt what my relatives told me, why should I doubt all clergymen? Had I not heard the awful stories about various wicked Infidels and Atheists (all unnamed), who had died in an agony of despair or remorse, or else in a state of drunkenness or in some other horrible manner? I had no wish to die like them. So, for my own happiness and that of others, I considered it my duty to try and persuade everyone to believe in God. I almost decided to become a missionary.

When I began my efforts in this direction, I soon made an important discovery. I found that although it was quite easy to believe in the existence of God myself, it was not easy to prove the belief to other people. I found that those who already believed in God would agree with my arguments quite readily, but those who were non-religious had an irritating way of producing counter-arguments which were new to me, and which I could not promptly overthrow. In other words, I discovered for the first time that personal conviction is no proof of the soundness of a belief.

For example, the favourite evangelical argument, "Pray to God sincerely and belief will come," had been met by the following counter-argument. "How can anyone pray sincerely to something which he does not believe in? If I pray to God, it would be the same as if you prayed to Ju-ju. Could you pray sincerely to Ju-ju in the hope that you would come to believe in him and not in God?" Of course I had to admit that I could not pray sincerely to any God except the Christian God. So I had to abandon *that* argument. I was aiming to convert unbelievers, not believers.

I had also tried what is called the "argument from Creation." How did the sun, moon and stars, the world and all the wonderful things in it get here un-

less God made them? But this only elicited a battery of counter-arguments such as the following. "Since you were not alive at the creation, how do you know how it occurred?" "If God made everything, who made God? If you say that God was uncreated, I say that the universe was uncreated. Prove me wrong if you can." "You say that God made everything, but other religions say that some other God made everything. If all these Gods are the same, why are the religions different—and which of them is right?" And so on.

Then again I had tried what is called the "argument from Design." I tried to show that there must be some Great Intelligence behind creation, by pointing out how beautifully flowers were made, or how perfectly the human eye had been constructed for the purpose of seeing, etc. But this argument was soon shattered. For if there were some Intelligence behind creation, it must be a pretty poor sort of Intelligence, by whatever standards we might choose to measure it. What of earthquakes, famines, and diseases? What of the thousands of human deformities, the lunatics, the criminals? What of pain and poverty and war? Surely, if the words good and evil meant anything at all, then God made a lot of evil things as well as good. And when I told them that it was the Devil, or human perversity, which was responsible for these bad things, the reply promptly came, "Who made humanity, and who made the Devil?"

The result of all this was that I was forced to realize the futility of argument when I was ignorant of my opponent's case. My conviction was firm, but so was that of my opponents. If I was to prove my belief, I would have to know what I was up against before I would be able to rout it. So I determined not only to study my own beliefs and their origins with greater seriousness than ever, but also to investigate the grounds for unbelief. And here is a list of some of the things I discovered. I found that:—

(1) My religious beliefs were entirely due to the teaching I had had as a child. If my parents had been Roman Catholic, or Jewish or Mahometan, my religion would certainly, to begin with, have been Roman Catholic, Jewish or Mahometan—and not Presbyterian.

(2) Even amongst so-called Christians there were great differences of belief, some of which were wholly incompatible with others.

(3) There were plenty of moral people who did not believe in God. And there were plenty of religious people who were immoral. Religion and morality were *not* the same thing.

(4) If Adam were really the first man, then the story of creation was second-hand. If God had told it to some human being, then he must have allowed two different stories to get about. For there are two stories in Genesis which contradict each other.

(5) The God of the Old Testament was a brutal and cruel being who did things of which a decent human being would be ashamed. Moreover, there are a number of disgusting stories in the Bible which are never read in church. Yet God is said to have inspired every word of it!

(6) None of the manuscripts, from which the present translation of the New Testament was made, was written until about two hundred years after Jesus is supposed to have lived. No one knows who wrote the books (despite their alleged authorship), nor when any of them had been written.

(7) In the writings of people who lived at the time when the events related in the New Testament are supposed to have occurred there is no positive evidence that such a person as Jesus really lived.

(8) At that time there were other earlier religions which had their own Saviours born of virgins, who performed miracles and rose from the dead. So Jesus was not the only one, nor even the first, to have such stories told about him. The evidence pointed strongly to the suspicion that Christianity was nothing more than a variation of some earlier religion or religions.

In all my reading and close study, both of Christian and non-Christian authorities, I came across not one single proof of the existence of God. But I did discover that the idea of God, that is to say of *one* God, was the mere whittling away of the earlier idea of *many* Gods; and that the idea of many gods grew out of the misunderstanding of the causes of natural and mostly uncontrollable phenomena, such as thunder, lightning, earthquakes, famines and diseases. And I also discovered that there is no material difference between religion and superstition; and that the more ignorant people are, the more religious they are.

In addition to this the whole history of the Christian religion proved what a terrible thing it had been to humanity. It was responsible for more quarrelling, cruelty, torture and bloodshed than any other single cause. It inspired the Crusaders and all their bestialities; it glorified the religious wars, massacres and persecutions of millions of people all over Europe; it was the reason for the horrible tortures and burnings of the Inquisition; it prompted the cruel treatment and execution of hundreds of poor old women who were believed to be "witches." Furthermore, it did nothing to stop the abominable slave trade in recent times, and it was helpless as an influence to prevent the holocaust of the Great War.

As for those persons who claim to be the chosen representatives of God—the Popes, Archbishops, Bishops, priests and all the rest—what did history tell me of them? Some were good, some were neither good nor bad, and many were the vilest of the vile. All that one could say of them, taking them all together, was that the world would have been better without them. With very few exceptions their sole aim in life seems to have been to keep the people in ignorance of the truth. They hindered the spread of knowledge; they balked the progress of education and enquiry; they opposed humane laws; they gathered wealth to themselves and did their best to gain the highest powers. And their morality—what of that? One would at least have expected a higher standard from them than from the rest of the people. But the contrary is the truth. The morality of the clergy only improved when improvement was forced upon them by the growing intelligence of the common people. And this growing intelligence was in direct proportion to the degree to which the common people cast off the shackles of their religious beliefs.

And now I am an Atheist. That is where my search for proof has led me, as it will inevitably lead anyone who prefers to verify his beliefs rather than accept them without proof.

C. S. FRASER.

IN NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIA.

Practically all the great authors of Nineteenth Century Russia were revolutionists—Tolstoy, the fanatical preacher of non-resistance; Dostoevski, who once actually stood on the scaffold; Stepniak, believed to have been the assassin of a Russian chief of police; Turgenev, imprisoned for his outspoken liberalism; Kropotkin, imprisoned for several years; Bakunin, who spent years in prison and in Siberia. For generations the road to Siberia was taken perforce by nearly everyone who dared to speak and write and act on behalf of a new and better order of society.—*New Popular Educator*.

Tom Barclay

Memoirs and Medleys: the Autobiography of a Bottle-washer. By the late Tom Barclay (Leicester: Edgar Bachus; 5s.)

It must be very nearly twenty years since my old friend—and present colleague—Teddie Preston, then fresh from Leicester, told me about Tom Barclay, the Philosopher, with the soul of a Socrates, and the occupation of a bottle-washer.

Memoirs and Medleys is, for more than one reason, an important piece of autobiography; it is comparable to those forgotten autobiographies of self-made men and working-men, James Lackington, Thomas Cooper, Joseph Barker, George Jacob Holyoake, C. M. Smith, William Lovett, for instance, that give infinitely more of the real stuff of human nature than any of the memoirs of the Alleged Good and Reputed Great that I have seen.

Here is a memorable autobiography by a man who had no interest in "getting on in the world," as the old Victorians used to call it, or "making money"; Tom Barclay was too absorbed in life itself to be interested in what the foul old Philistines used to call "the value of money," which, if I may here be slightly autobiographical myself for a moment, is one of the numerous phrases that darkened my own childhood.

All his life Tom Barclay remained a working-man; he would have scorned to be anything else. Herein lies the key to his superb and unique manhood. In several ways he recalls the forgotten—but very bright—Eighteenth Century Freethinker, Thomas Chubb, who, in his very brief, but sufficing, autobiography, writes:—

The Author lived a *single life*, he judging it greatly improper to introduce a family into the world, without a *prospect* of maintaining them, which was *his* case; such adventures being usually attended with great poverty, the parent of much misery; and that was a state of life that he did not choose to *rush* into. And though, according to the proverb, God does not send *mouths* without sending *meat* to fill them; yet our Author saw, by daily experience, that meat to some was not to be obtained but with great difficulty. And as to trusting to providence, in such cases, the Author thought it was rather *groundlessly presuming* upon providence, than a proper trust in it; nor did he find that providence *interposed* to extricate its pretended *dependents* out of their difficulties.

Here is Chubb's history repeated in Tom Barclay; James R. Kelly, the Editor of this book, says exactly the same thing of his hero:—

Then, later, as his understanding developed, and his observation of the facts of life around him made it clear that he was likely to remain poor always, he determined never to marry and beget children to be subject to such horrible privations as those through which he had passed.

There are passages in this delightful and fresh record that move me as much as anything in history; they seem to me of the very stuff of life itself; the real sweet essence of life that keeps humanity going. This, for instance:—

Here let me tell a story I heard of him many years ago. One night a man who knew him met him on St. Saviour's Road, and was surprised to see that he was crying like a child. He went to him and said, "Whatever is the matter, Mr. Barclay?" "Bradlaugh's dead!" replied Tom. The same deep feeling of affection for one highly prized impelled him, the unbeliever, to pay for Masses for his dead sister, and to shed tears of bitter grief on the death of one who was the champion of the right and the duty of every man to think freely on all questions, and to hold to the conclusions which seemed to him to be true, against all comers.

Here is another passage that I must quote; it should reach as many minds as possible:—

I chose Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, for my patron saint on account of his reputed great Learning, but I've done with him. What do you think he says: you'll find it in Part Three of the *Summa*: he says, "*Beati in Regno Coelesti videbunt pœnas damnatorum ut beatudo illis magis compleceat.*" That means that the happiness of the Blessed in Heaven will be increased by watching the torments of the damned. You'd think

the most hardened murderer—the most insidious poisoner—would hardly announce such a thought, if he were hellish enough to think it. Contrast the sentiment with that expressed by the pessimistic poet James Thomson,

If any human soul at all
Must die the second death, and fall
Into that gulf of quenchless flame,

Then I give God my scorn and hate,
And turning back from Heaven's Gate
(Suppose me got there) bid "Adieu,
Almighty Devil; damn me too."

This gives the precise difference in quality between Supernaturalism and Humanism. The statement is complete and final; there is nothing more relevantly to be said, and there never will be. Mr. Arnold Lunn and the rest of the Neo-Catholics who have recently rediscovered "the Angelic Doctor" might think-over this quotation from the life of a heretic and ex-Catholic who, "waking-up to life," found that he had no further use for the alleged "Consolations" of the sweetly-reasonable Catholic creed.

Humanity, as this self-initiated philosopher discovered for himself, does not really need the "Angelicalism" that preaches permanent hell-fire to "sinners." What humanity needs is the humanism that insists on human love as the panacea for human ills. That was Tom Barclay's gospel; and, unless it be adopted by Europe, there is an end to European civilization. Here is a Freethinking Bottle-washer who puts to shame an "angelic doctor," who is also a Catholic Saint. I will leave the discerning reader to discover the moral for himself.

Barclay was born in 1852. Here is a picture "from the life" of Christian and Capitalist England in the days before Trades Unions and Freethought had made things a little more tolerable for those whom Christian charity called "the common people," and "the lower orders":—

What sort of an existence was it where a mother giving suck had to be hours away from home trying to earn something? When the kids of the yard were not molesting us, I as eldest was nurse, and often have I put my tongue into baby's mouth to be sucked in lieu of "titty" to stop her cries. The cries used to cease for a minute, and then were resumed as the tongue gave no satisfaction. Poor cooped-up vermin-infected brats! But I am suffering much more now probably in simply remembering our state than I actually suffered then: we did not feel the dimness and squalour and foul smells—the horror of the bugs and lice and black-beetles—as I now, many years after, feel them: we had no other life, no other sensations or feelings. This was life, and we knew no other to contrast it with. Does the worm wish to be a butterfly, or the mole a lark?

This paragraph is taken from the first chapter of the bottle-washer's autobiography; this chapter is a masterpiece of descriptive writing; true, poignant, simple, unforgettable.

"Poor as we were," continues the Philosopher, "we were not the poorest in the court; the very poorest were too proud to let the others know how poor they were: they felt shame of what they couldn't possibly help, as when they broke the only saucepan in the house, and had to borrow one."

Here is a picture of a poor man's home in England in the mid-nineteenth century—say three-quarters of a century ago; it will be allowed, I think, that "God" and the Bourgeoisie who then ruled England—according to the Bourgeoisie—did their work well and characteristically:—

I'm sure we never had a complete bath in all our childhood's years, unless such a thing is indispensable to the newly-born. Mother did all that was possible, but she had neither time nor means to boil our rags of shirts and sheets when washing. We had no wash-tub nor dolly-pegs, not to speak of wringing and mangling-machines: there could have been no room for such in a room only nine feet by nine; even had we possessed them, eh, Mother? So we went unwashed, and pediculus thrived greatly in his two principal species, *capitis* and *vestimentis*, and God's beautiful image was preyed upon daily and nightly. No fault of Mother's.

When he was eight years old Tom went to work for eighteen pence a week; "Unwashed, ill-clothed, ill-fed, untaught, worried by vermin, I worked in all

weathers, and not without scolding and threats of violence, seventy hours a week for—how much? One shilling and sixpence." Work began at six a.m., and ended late at night.

There is a chapter in this book wherein any Irishman will rejoice. It concerns the Gaelic League, and the attempts—partially successful—to revive Erse as a living tongue. By descent Tom Barclay was pure, or almost pure, Irish; and he learnt to read fluently his ancestral speech.

All the Celtic Revival names occur in this miniature history—for that is what it is—of the Irish National Revival that began in the 'nineties of last century with Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats, Dr. Douglas Hyde, George Russell (A. E.), and others as "sponsorial artists," if I may coin a phrase.

Barclay was in London, earning half-a-crown a day as a circular-distributor, whilst the Gaelic League was holding its Irish classes. "During the eighteen months I lived in London, I think I never missed a single lesson."

Writing these Memoirs in his old age, the author records—in Leicester, anyway—the decline and fall of Erse interest. "But one Irish speaker is left to-day in Leicester—Maggie Brown." Whimsically he compares Maggie Brown to Dolly (or, as he calls her, Dorothea) Pentreath, the famous eighteenth-century centenarian who was the last speaker of Cornish as a living tongue; "and I, a would-be Irishman, and Dick Hancock, an Englishman with a Jewish strain in him are the only two who can read an Irish book or newspaper."

Barclay visited Ireland three times; his chief adoration is for Irish music; for he himself was a bit of a musician, and he had the old airs in his blood.

The hero of this book became something of a poet, something of a linguist, something of an artist; and a good deal of a thinker. That he was a Socialist and a Freethinker need scarcely be told. Barclay's ideal was a very human one—an ideal, happily, still amongst us—George Bernard Shaw, of whom I shall write presently. He also knew Ruskin, Morris, and the delightful Edward Carpenter. Amongst his intimates were J. W. Barrs, "B.V.'s" intimate, and Sydney A. Gimson, both of Leicester, his native town; the latter of these writes a Foreword to this book. It is clearly his job; for he was a friend of Barclay's for nearly half a century.

The names of those admired and heard by Tom Barclay are those of the men and women to whom we owe all the improvements in English life that have happened in the last eighty years; George Jacob Holyoake, Thomas Cooper, Morris, Hyndman, Kropotkin, Foote, Bradlaugh, Tom Mann, Hubert Bland, Sydney Webb, Cunninghame Graham, Auberon Herbert, Dr. Aveling, Annie Besant, George Cores (whom I am proud to hail as a present colleague of my own), J. M. Robertson, Enid Stacey, D. J. Nichol, amongst them. There are many others; but this list suffices to give a sample of the company to which the fortunate reader of this book is introduced. It is a glorious company, the very flower of England's noblest hope and thought and work. What are the good of hope and thought and work if they be not used in the service of the people? Such was Tom Barclay's view; and it is the only one worth holding. All the rest is personal ambition and social self-seeking, and worth neither having nor recording.

Barclay "discovered" Shaw, as he says, years before the crowd of bookmakers and journalists who now find that worthy reformer and dramatist good and remunerative "copy." In Shaw he found centred all the idealisms whereto his life was devoted; that unique and picturesque Irishman "stood" for the future in a way that "got" Tom Barclay absolutely. He was probably the first, as he was assuredly the noblest of the Shavians.

This book contains six illustrations; the two that seem to me really to get there are an admirable portrait of Shaw that is new to me; and an exquisite photograph of the author "taken in August, 1932, on the Western Park." In that picture the whole history of this humanist hero may be "read at a blink." It is the last photograph of Tom Barclay ever taken.

The book is edited by James R. Kelley, whose epilogue is worthy of its subject.

Here is an unique and human work, fresh, clean, and honest. The only work like it that I have seen is a forgotten history of the early nineteenth century called *The Memoirs of Robert Blincoe*, and in both depth and range the palm goes to Thomas Patrick Barclay, who has, I think, despite his modesty and gentleness of soul, achieved a posthumous immortality. All honour be to these self-effacing and self-cultured humans who are the salt of our race.

There is not much doubt that future editions of this book will appear; on half-a-dozen counts it is notable; this first edition, if I know ought about such matters, will become valuable. When the next edition appears I hope that the rather frequent misprints, especially in foreign words, will receive the attention of a competent proof-reader. The most irritating error is the repeated misprint of Evelyn Douglas's name as *Evylin* Douglas: a hideous, if original, version. It should also be mentioned, by the way, that "Evelyn Douglas" is the pen-name of the poet John Barlas.

I will not close this notice of an exquisite piece of life without giving the Editor's concluding sentence. "It is the crowning glory of such a man as Tom Barclay that intimacy with him created, confirmed and increased faith in the essential goodness of human nature."

All honour to the Pioneers; of such is the Kingdom of Man; and the Kingdom of Man is the utmost that our Planet can hope to achieve.

VICTOR B. NEUBURG.

Acid Drops.

And in Glasgow, too! The Parks Committee of the Glasgow Corporation has decided to permit bowls, golf and tennis in all the sports centres under its control. And this directly after the religious protests against selling ice cream on Sunday. But if Our Lord cannot stand up against ice cream, how can he be expected to stand against the attraction of bowls, tennis and golf?

The Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking at the Mansion House, appealed for more money to maintain Christian Colleges in India. "No chapter in our history," he said, "is more wonderful than the record of the linking of our people with India." We should have thought the less said the better about these particular "records." The "links" referred to are stained with blood, and tell of spoliation, exploitation and the worst sort of commercial chicanery. After all is it worth while spending millions of pounds to attempt the conversion of India from Buddhism and other native religions, to a Christianity which has never repudiated the God who commanded "His" chosen people to invade other people's territories, to slaughter the inhabitants except the best of the women who were to be reserved for the vilest purposes?

The Rev. Alistair McLean, B.D., writes unctuously on "The Words of Jesus on the Mount." His fatuous glorification of God is eloquent if terribly stale. God appears to have been a queer sort of "omnipotent" monarch, capable of the most surprising things—sometimes. But, although Mr. McLean calls Him a "Rock," and tells us that "without Him, man can do nothing," and "without prayer you cannot win," yet when McLean, B.D. drops the "Rock" business and comes down to bedrock, he is compelled to admit that "You and I," are really, after all, "the builders of the house, and the materials that make it storm-and-wind-proof you know." There is much virtue in the colloquial "you know" of the Rev. gentleman. He knows and we all know, that man has to provide the plans, the material, the skill and the labour—then when the house is completely built and furnished God does all the rest—with the accent on the "rest."

The *Methodist Times* boasts that "Methodism was the pioneer of Cinema Evangelism." It was, of course, Artemus Ward who was the Picture Panorama Pioneer, but

although he frankly advertised himself, "*Gas Man . . . A Ward*," his "Evangelism" was more witty than Wesleyan. Remembering the Prohibition humbug which the Methodist Churches "pioneered" in U.S.A., we are not enthusiastic over the news that a "Religious Film Society" has been established by English Methodists. That Church, like many others, looks with greedy eyes at "twenty million people visiting English Cinemas alone every week." (In parenthesis we would say that the word "alone" is out of place grammatically and literally, in this *Methodist Times* statement). The same journal wants to see "enlistment on an organized scale to stimulate and foster the new Film Society on a national scale." There certainly will be sufficient Bible stories to outclass the worst of the Gangster films, and as to "Silly Symphonies," the Methodist new Hymn Book has a vast field of suitable themes.

"Can a Christian Be a Fascist?" is the subject announced for a lecture by Rev. E. N. Porter Goff. Nowadays, at least, a Christian can be anything (and often is). If to be a Fascist means that one is in favour of an absolute autocracy the Bible is full of Fascism, and the Kingdom of Heaven is the most perfect example of Fascist Government. If Fascism means mere brutality, a crowd of healthy (physically healthy) young ruffians mobbing a weak old man there are many examples in the Old Testament, and some highly suspicious stories of Apostolic days (such as Acts v. 5-6), and that most Christian Fascist murder of Hypatia. We are very interested to hear that the Rev. Porter Goff, besides being Vicar of a Streatham church, advertises himself as a "Member of the British Union of Fascists." After all the (British) Socialists long ago decided that a Christian could be a Socialist. We know that the good Republicans of America believe in absolute monarchy (in Heaven). Martin Luther's "Nose of wax," inadequately describes religious adaptability: The whole body is of gelatine. As the poet says of Christianity generally:—

"Characterized at first by its ferocity,
Distinguished nowadays by nebulousity."

Another rumpus in the Established Church. This time the big bad sheep is the Dean of Exeter, who has allowed Dr. Scott Lidgett and other "Noncons" to bore the congregation in Exeter Cathedral. Far more entertaining is the Bishop of Exeter, who, when interviewed in the *Exeter Express*, declared, "If I had been asked I should certainly have refused permission . . . but I have no doubt that it will have a very good effect." This may seem logical enough to a believer in the three-in-one theory, but it sounds pretty silly to everyone else. The Bishop adds, "I have always observed the law, not that I agree with it." . . . "I do not like the law: I dislike it, but I keep it." This is one of the reasons why the Church is so popular! It upholds good laws and bad laws alike, whereas all progress in civilization depends on good men refusing to administer bad laws, ignoring them, disobeying them and if necessary, fighting them. It has been calculated that at least 50,000 lives of innocent women were saved by the fact that judges, juries and the people refused to obey the infamous Mosaic and State law, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." The *repeal* of the law was half a century behind the revolt of those who disagreed with the Bishop of Exeter's complaisant attitude.

Incidentally the Bishop of Exeter's press interview reveals a very interesting attitude of mind as to the nature of Christian "belief." He admits that even the latest and most lenient canon of the church, passed in A.D. 1865, demands that every clergyman when ordained *must assent* to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. This assent "must be formally made before the Bishop and must be recorded." The Bishop assures us, however, that such "assent only means that the clergyman will not preach against the Thirty-Nine Articles." Only a Christian could descend to such a contemptible bad faith.

What with a Great War which was to bring about a stupendous revival in religion, a pious engineer like Sir John Reith using the B.B.C. to broadcast everything possible in favour of Christianity—no matter which brand, as long as it calls itself Christianity—and our national newspapers devoting columns to the service of the Church, there ought to be hardly a Freethinker left in this “vale of tears.” We often wonder how many millions are really touched by all this feverish activity. For example, Mr. James Fairlie is allowed every now and then to publish in the *Daily Express*, with its immense circulation, one of those sublime articles which ought to reach the heart of every lost sheep in England. With almost tearful fervour, he implores his readers to come back to Jesus or the Church; or at least, please, please, read the Bible. We are heartily at one with him here, but not for exactly the same reason. Our complaint is that Christians, generally speaking, simply won't study the Bible. They will talk about it, quote it, insist that it is a Divine Revelation, but wild horses won't make them really study it.

Mr. Fairlie is of exactly the same opinion. He claims that the Bible is the “World's Best Seller”—in fact 20,000,000 Bibles have been sold since the War, in Great Britain alone. Why is it not read as well? Why do not our bright young people make a habit of reading a portion every day? Why do they not carry a Bible about with them, and read it at cock-tail parties, or the races, or stop their cars now and then and declaim some of the chapters in the open air? Why oh why, do they prefer cock-tails to the Bible? Mr. Fairlie asks them to read Luke and the Sermon on the Mount, and other well known portions. But what if they do? Does he imagine that the stories of Jesus or Elijah flying to heaven, the ridiculous miracles, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, Jesus stopping a storm, or turning water into wine, will ever again be believed in as historical occurrences? The Bible may be a “treasure house” of many good things, but the idea that it is a “Divine Revelation” has been shattered by Christians themselves. And neither Mr. Fairlie nor any other believing Christian cares anything for the Bible except as the Book of God. We want it read, for nobody with any understanding of primitive beliefs or history could possibly believe it. Modern research has killed it.

The question of Unitarians being allowed to preach (or “deliver an address”) in a Christian Church is still agitating Trinitarians. Scholarship does not matter in the least insists one Anglo-Catholic writer. On the one side are “three separated Divine Persons,” and on the other, “one solitary Divine Person,” and Bishop Barnes, who is liked by neither Roman nor Anglo-Catholics, is severely criticized for the views he recently gave on Unitarianism. He tried hard to bridge the difficulties, but the Anglos (and, of course, the Romans) will not have the Bishop's assertion “that an honest endeavour to serve God with the faithfulness of Jesus is more important than a sound philosophy of the Divine Nature.” The Christian Church is no place for those who do not believe in the Trinity, and whittling down its meaning so that it can embrace a Unity must not be tolerated. Poor Bishop Barnes! He really tries hard to make Christians and Christian Unitarians love one another, but it can't be done. It never will be done, either.

Anything that savours of birth-control is anathema to our bachelor bishops and archbishops. They are, naturally, particularly well-placed to criticize the right of some poor harassed woman to decide for herself whether, in the interests of her family or home, or even in the interests of an unborn child, she ought to risk motherhood again. It is the celibate Roman Catholic priest, however, who seems to foam at the mouth whenever the subject is raised. The latest example is Archbishop Macintosh of Glasgow, in his Lenten Pastoral Letter, and he says “that the very air around us is quivering everywhere with the obscene buzz. . . .” These interfering

priests see “obscenity” directly sex is mentioned, and imagine they can do anything to stop the movement by associating it with “indecent.” The remedy, he says, is the following:—

One is never to allow oneself to be impressed in the matters in question by the utterances of well-known public men or women no matter how many letters of the alphabet they may have before or after their names, or how much or how little they have social rank. . . . Get in touch with a conscientious medical adviser. Of such there is no lack amongst the body of Catholic medical men and women throughout Glasgow.

Whatever may be the birth-rate among the Catholic poor in Glasgow or elsewhere, it would be very interesting to know what it is among the Catholic well-to-do people. We venture to say there is very little difference anywhere among those who can afford to pay for information, Catholic or heretic.

As for Catholic doctors, take the case of Dr. W. J. Donovan, M.P.—who, it will be remembered “talked out” the Divorce Bill recently in the House of Commons. He actually believes in the reality of the Lourdes “miracles.” They were, he said the other day, “effected by the swift operation of the Finger of God.” In the same address, he talked about “St. Luke, the skilled physician,” and “the gifted artist,” whose “paintings of Our Lady have been the inspiration of every Christian painter since.” His hearers no doubt believed St. Luke was a “skilled physician” in the modern sense, and the interesting addition about his “paintings” is equally funny and equally true. If credulity and ignorance are qualities that make for a “conscientious medical adviser,” then Dr. Donovan fills the bill.

Fifty Years Ago.

LETTER TO JUDGE NORTH BY G. W. FOOTE, IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM IMPRISONMENT FOR BLASPHEMY.

You sentenced me to twelve months imprisonment like a common thief, on the ground that I had “prostituted to the service of the Devil” the “great ability with which God had endowed” me. Many people have been astonished to hear such words from the lips of an English judge in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Why I cannot conjecture; for if God had not noticed my dereliction, or was in a slothful mood, it was highly judicious on your part to atone for his neglect; and if you like to keep a devil, it is sheer impudence to deny your right to bring him into court.

I have done my twelve months' imprisonment, and am once more a free man. My health is not quite broken down, nor is my mind in the least degree impaired. But while I am thankful for this, I regret that I have not sufficiently profited by the fresh Evidence of Christianity which you manufactured for my especial behoof. Although I have lived for a whole year in a felon's cell, in daily contact with thieves, sharpers, forgers, ravishers, burglars, and other noble products of Christian civilization; although I have read the Bible through three times, gone to chapel every other day, and dutifully listened to fifty-two sermons; although I have reflected daily on your own splendid example of piety and charity; I am still unconverted and impenitent. And, what is even worse, I am instigated by the Devil to persevere in my sin.

This week's *Freethinker*, as you will notice, is just as “blasphemous” as the number you tried me for publishing, and I have recommenced the woodcuts which excited your special indignation. Such is my obstinacy! Such is my appreciation of the Gospel of Holloway Gaol! I can only throw myself on your indulgence, and hope you will not relax your noble efforts to convert infidels to the true faith. And in order that you may not lose an opportunity of exercising your generous qualities, I leave this number of the *Freethinker* at your house with my card.

The “*Freethinker*,” March 16, 1884.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL:

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

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—H. Jessop, £1.

A. ELSEY.—The *Daily Express* articles on "If Christ Came Back?" are on the usual "stunt" lines—stuffed full of imbecilities, and care taken that anyone capable of writing a sensible article is shut out. What with the dope of the B.B.C. and that of the yellow press, there is small wonder that public opinion is as ill-informed as it is. Thanks for sending cuttings, but the articles are too silly for lengthy notice.

R. S. MASON.—Pleased you find the "Views and Opinions" on "Splitting Hairs," and "Words and Phrases" so interesting. As we have said, we intend them to be essays in reasoning, using by way of illustration, subjects of Freethought controversy. Another reader writes that he finds them difficult to follow. We are sorry, but one cannot write so as to satisfy all tastes.

D.P.S.—There does seem to be a need for restating from time to time the aims of both the N.S.S. and of the Freethought movement. That is inevitable. It does not imply dullness on the part of those who need it, so much as lack of acquaintance with the subjects. But, of course, dullness is a very common ailment.

C.E.T.—Thanks for cuttings. You will see we have written on the subject.

W. T. GOUGH (Johannesburg).—*Selections from Ingersoll* despatched on February 2, there was a little delay owing to binding the work. Hope you have now received the book safely.

A. H. DEVEREUX (N.W.11).—Your reserved copy of *Selections from Ingersoll* can now be obtained from the office, please collect, as supply is nearly exhausted.

A. CORINA.—We were never so absurd as to say, or to think, that anyone was at liberty in this country to say whatever he pleases at any time or place. Anyone who comes to this conclusion after reading the *Freethinker* must be subject to delusions. There is too much interference with opinion, and too much obstruction to its free circulation in this country, and we have done as much as most to press for the right of free speech. But the question is one of relative freedom when contrasting this country with others.

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. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press," and crossed "Midland Bank, Ltd., Clerkenwell Branch."

Sugar Plums.

On Sunday next (March 25) Mr. Cohen will visit Manchester, and will lecture in the Picture House, Market Street, at 7.0. His subject will be "Is Christianity Played Out?" We hope that Manchester Freethinkers will advertise the meeting among their friends as much as possible. Admission is free, but there will be some reserved seats at 1s. This is the concluding lecture of the season.

To-day (March 18) Mrs. Janet Chance will lecture in the Clarion Cafe, Market Street, Manchester, at 7.30. Those who heard Mrs. Chance on her previous visit will need no urging to be present. Those who did not, should make it a special point to be present, and bring a friend with them.

We congratulate Lord Snell on his election to the Chairmanship of the new London County Council. It is an important post, and the election of one who has been associated with Freethought all his life, will be specially welcomed by the older members of the Freethought Movement.

We remark in "Views and Opinions" on the fact that the falsehoods told by the B.B.C. have usually just that modicum of truth which helps to satisfy the "Christian Conscience." But it would be unfair to others to give the B.B.C. a monopoly of this art. For example, Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, M.P., writes in the *Daily Telegraph*, for March 12, that he thinks the B.B.C. deserves sympathy rather than blame for shutting Mr. Ferrie down. But he makes the clumsy mistake of giving reasons for his statement, by saying that the speech

contains a significant attack on the Christian religion (which) reads exactly like a Communist manifesto rather cleverly disguised as opinion arising out of the nature of factory work.

In order to exhibit the mentality of Mr. Lloyd, we print the whole of the section on religion,

About religion. The development of our machine age has killed the hell-fire and brimstone idea. Just as our boss has become impersonal so has religion. I've described my factory. In the factory we live in a very real world. Levers, buttons, belts, power. These are the instruments and agencies which work the conveyors. If the "juice" is cut off the whole of the mechanism stops. Should anything go wrong with the machinery the worker or the foreman would not dream of looking for some supernatural cause. He would examine the machinery. Can you wonder, then, that the modern worker looks at life generally in the same way? Miracles don't happen in the workshop, and matter of fact explanations can be found for most evils. Why then should I apply some other standard to my emotions, or, if you prefer, spiritual life? You may be shocked, but honestly my mates are not impressed by supernatural explanations which come within their experience. Have you ever thought that this might be the explanation for the alarm of the dwindling congregations?

Now that is absolutely all that Mr. Ferrie had to say about religion, and a man must be more than usually stupid, or bigoted, or untruthful, to claim that this was out of place in an address which was intended to convey a workman's impression of the present industrial system and its influence on life. The matter becomes the graver when we remember the "bilge" that is permitted about the fundamental admiration of the working-classes for Christ and "true" Christianity, and the quantity of religious propaganda the B.B.C. dispenses, with never a word of reply permitted.

The B.B.C. is determined that no more Ferrie incidents is to occur. In future it is announced that a speaker will be asked to give an undertaking that he, or she, will keep strictly to the manuscript that has been passed, or doctored by the censors. Where there is any suspicion the speech will be recorded and then run off a gramophone record. This is the crowning insult to those who are asked to speak. Will men in the position of H. G. Wells show their disapproval of this by refusing to speak for the B.B.C. until the public can have some guarantee that the speech to which they are listening is made by the speaker and not by Sir John Reith and Company? It is idle for them to protest against dictatorships elsewhere while they tacitly support one in Portland Place.

One of the *Sunday Dispatch* writers suggests that as no one can be sure that a B.B.C. speaker is saying what he means, "it would save a lot of scandal if in future Sir John Reith himself wrote all the speeches to be broadcast. Then he could censor himself, alter himself, rewrite himself, ask himself permission, refuse himself, substitute a programme of gramophone records for himself, tear himself up, and throw himself in the waste-paper basket." But that would probably be too open, and too honest a policy for the B.B.C. to adopt. And the only profit in fooling a people is that they shall not know they are being fooled.

But we hope that everyone we can reach in any part of the country will make it part of his or her job, to keep before the public the plain fact that in every case where we have not the assurance of the speaker that he is saying all he wishes to say, or would like to say, that what is being said is only what the B.B.C. amateur parson, retired Colonel, and retired Admiral thinks the public ought to know. If that were done on a sufficiently large and persistent scale, some of our publicists might be induced to show as much independence of character as did Mr. Ferrie.

Ultimately we must, we think, come back to this plain position. There is no likelihood of real freedom of thought and speech being guaranteed by any corporation or body of men that control either the news or the machinery of education. The only guarantee we can have of this is an enlightened public opinion, which recognizes the equal right to expression of all opinion, whether we consider the opinion to be right or wrong, "dangerous" or "safe." And the only paper that to-day stands unreservedly for this right is the *Freethinker*. It serves no financial, economic, or any other interest. It aims neither at pleasing its readers, nor fears offending them. It is always run at a loss, and as it is not governed by advertisers, it is likely to remain a financially losing proposition. But there was never a greater need for a paper such as the *Freethinker*, and its disappearance would leave a gap in English journalism that no other paper could fill. We hope our friends will bear these facts in mind—otherwise the time may come when they will bitterly regret they did not.

Mr. G. Whitehead will be in Glasgow to-day (Sunday), and will speak in the Woodside Hall, Glenfarg Street, at 7 p.m., on "Marxian and Other Interpretations of History." Mr. Whitehead has many friends in Glasgow, and that, together with the subject, should ensure a full attendance and an interesting evening.

One of our readers would like to know of a day school run on secular lines in the Chelsea or Westminster district. Details of such school or schools sent to the *Freethinker* office would be greatly appreciated.

Birmingham saints are looking forward to Mr. R. H. Rosetti's visit to-day (Sunday), when he will speak in the Bristol Street Schools at 7 p.m. on "People, Dictators and Persecution." While speaking of Birmingham, we congratulate the Branch Secretary, Mr. T. G. Millington, on his clear and pointed letter in the *Birmingham Daily Mail*.

A request was recently made to the Finchley Public Library Committee by a lady ratepayer that the *Freethinker* should be placed in the reading-room of the public library. There are plenty of religious papers there, but the Committee, perhaps wisely, decided that the influence of these journals would be quite negated if the *Freethinker* was on hand. The papers have recently been protesting against the stupid censorship exerted by Sir John Reith and his motley crowd of nobodies on the B.B.C. It is about time that some strong protest was also made by those who have any regard for freedom of speech against the equally stupid censorship exerted by these public libraries committees very often composed of individuals who are quite destitute of literary judgment—arbitrarily deciding what the users of the libraries may read. We invite *Freethinker* readers in the Finchley area to keep up the agitation. The *Freethinker* has the same right to be available as any other paper—no more and certainly no less.

THE SUREST REFUGE.

If you have a lie to support, it is always best to seek facts to defend it: that it has served so well, and stood so long is one; that so many good men have believed it, is another; but the best of all—which, of course, you keep to yourself—is that it pays you better to accept it than acknowledge the truth.

Some Notes on the Septuagint

A GREAT many people seem to be unaware that the *Codex Sinaiticus* contains a large portion of the Old Testament as well as the New. It is, unfortunately, not complete. No doubt most of the missing parts were used as fire-lighters by the monks, in whose keeping the *Codex* was found by Tischendorf. It would be interesting to know how and why these people, who ought to have been the first to see the value of any ancient manuscript, managed to find out that this particular one was quite valueless.

Now, whether there will be unanimity of opinion or not as to the sum paid for it by the British Museum, there surely can be no difference of opinion as to the value of the *Codex Sinaiticus* from the point of view of Biblical criticism.

Not that the orthodox critics are altogether delighted. The real object of the study of all Bible MSS. is to find out, if possible, the *original text*. The emendations, the incorporation of transcribers' and editors' notes and private opinions, the wholesale omission of words, phrases and lines, make the task of pious critics quite heartbreaking. This applies, curiously enough, more to the text of the New Testament than to the Old, and in this article I want to confine myself to the Septuagint, as it is called.

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. When it was actually made, and where, and by whom, and from what Hebrew text, nobody knows. That is the blunt, plain fact. Of course, many statements on the question have been made. They can be found in almost any orthodox *Bible Handbook*, or *Aids to Students*, and the distinguishing feature of most of these statements is that they are copied from one another. There have been a few exhaustive treatises on the Greek Bible, but quite big books can often be made on subjects one knows very little about. The classic example is the life of Shakespeare. We could put all we actually know about him in a dozen or so lines; but the various biographies extend over hundreds of pages—and still they come.

What we do know about the Septuagint, in the first place, we owe to a gentleman called Aristeus, who, writing to his brother, Philocrates, tells us that, about 273 B.C., a translation of the Hebrew Bible was wanted by Ptolemy Philadelphus for the enrichment of the famous Alexandria library. Aristeus was sent to Jerusalem with Andreas, the Captain of Ptolemy's guards, to obtain the assistance of the high priest, and they obtained a copy of the law, written in letters of gold, together with six translators from each of the twelve tribes. They all returned to Alexandria, were invited to a banquet which lasted for seven days, and the scribes then went to the Island of Pharos. It took them each exactly seventy-two days to finish the translation, each scribe in a separate cell, and their work, when finished, was found in every point exactly to agree, thus proving it must have been done by divine guidance.

This story is just a little too naive for even very pious Christians to swallow, and so, naturally, it is stigmatized as "fabulous"; though I am not able to see exactly why it should be so called, when far sillier stories are believed in from the Gospels on no better authority.

The fact remains, however, that in whatever way the translation was made—if it is a translation—that the Septuagint appeared somewhere about the date assigned to it. That is, the Pentateuch appeared first and the remaining books were gradually added.

I have said, "if it is a translation." This is almost as heretical as saying the Gospels might have

been written first in Latin, and our "original" Greek text is the translation. The truth is, I have spent a little time trying to find out exactly from what text was the Septuagint translated, and I am as much in the dark as ever.

The orthodox theory is that the Jews (which Jews is never quite clear), were always writing accounts of their history. First it was Adam, then some of his descendants such as Noah and Abraham and Joseph, who left "records" of their dealings with God and man. Then came Moses, who either wrote the whole of the Pentateuch from these records, or wrote under "divine" inspiration. As the Jews or Israelites were supposed to have been enslaved in Egypt for hundreds of years, Moses, though writing perfect Hebrew, engrafted quite a large number of Egyptian words and phrases into his account. Joshua continued the "history," then Samuel, and so on, till about the time of the Babylonian captivity there were a large number of documents containing the history of man from the time of Creation, and also the history of Judah and Israel. It is not quite clear what became of these documents. Rabbis, writing many centuries later, had wonderful explanations as to how these records and documents were either destroyed, and that Ezra wrote them all out again in perfect Hebrew, not mistaking a single letter; or that they were not really destroyed but gathered together and "edited" by Ezra. There is no evidence whatever either way. There is no evidence that there were any documents at all. We have found all sorts of Assyrian and Babylonian and Hittite records, but not a line from these pre-Ezra archives. Nobody knows what language, for certain, they were written in, if they existed. It may have been "Old" Hebrew, though nobody has ever seen a line of Old Hebrew—at least, as far as I have been able to discover. It may have been Aramaic or Chaldee or a mixture of both, but nobody knows. It is all pure conjecture.

In the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, there is a very fine section on the Bible, called "Text and Versions." It is a full account of the "original" texts in Hebrew and Greek, and all the various versions. There is no information given of the so-called Ezra text at all, for the section on the Old Testament commences with an account of our present Hebrew text, that is, a text which cannot go back, in the form we have it, earlier than the fifth or sixth centuries. It is known as the Massoretic text, the Hebrew text finally settled by the inclusion of various vowel points, etc., by a Jewish sect called the Massorites. Nobody seems to know much about them, who they were, or on what authority they dealt with the then-existing Hebrew text, which, in turn, nobody seems to know much about either.

It is quite true that the plea is constantly put forward that the Jews looked upon their Bible with such reverence that in copying it, they took the utmost pains and were subject to so many rules, that it was almost impossible for them to make a mistake. This, however, only applies to the Massoretic text and not to the previous one or ones.

The *Encyclopedia Biblica* does, however, attempt a sketch of the development of the Old Testament in the section called "Historical Literature." The writer tells us that it is "highly probable that the earliest Hebrew historians wrote in the reign of Solomon (middle of the tenth century, B.C.)," and he then shows how—in his opinion—the various books were composed. From internal evidence, he, and the school of Biblical criticism to which he belongs, are fairly certain that many hands went to their making. Some are called Jehovistic, some Elohist, some a

mixture of both, others Priestly or Deuteronomistic, with various editors in the differing camps. What language all these people wrote in, I have not been able to discover—though any passage bearing on this question may have escaped me.

Now, were these documents in existence when Aristeus was sent by Ptolemy to Jerusalem for the purpose of making a Greek translation? Aristeus says yes, for the book he received was complete, written in golden characters. All the authorities, who have examined Aristeus's *History of the Septuagint*, reject his story as "fabulous"—or in other words, as a lie. And this is where a humble investigator into these problems, finds it so difficult. When one secures some sort of a clue to the question I am asking, he is told, "Of course, that is a forgery." Indeed, one might definitely say that the history of the (so-called) Old Hebrew text is so surrounded by lies that it possibly never will be truly known.

But we have the Septuagint, you will say. Yes, we have. One of the oldest copies of parts of it is in the *Codex Sinaiticus*, and it differs (so far as I can judge from accounts of it) from the text given in the *Codex Vaticanus*, and from that in the *Codex Alexandrinus*. All these differ from other fragments and copies, and nobody really knows which is the genuine text, and it looks as if nobody ever will. Just as there are attempts to get a "resultant" text of the Gospels, so, I understand, there are attempts to get a definite text of the Septuagint—and it may now be in existence for all I know.

Now it may be said, once for all, that the Greek Septuagint text, however it was compiled, was the Bible of the Jews for many centuries, and certainly of the Christians for over 1,000 years. It was the Holy Bible. The Jews, in many parts of the then-known world, knew no other, and it must have been in constant use in Jerusalem at the supposed time of Jesus. The Gospel writers used it. Paul used it also, and Josephus seems to have been only acquainted with this Greek version, whatever he may say about the Hebrew.

Until Christianity became established the Jews regarded the Septuagint with every veneration. When, however, Jewish nationalism was smashed by the Romans, the Rabbis set to work to produce a "Hebrew" Bible of their own. They did not believe in sharing it with the hated Christians or Pagans. The Jews also tried to improve the Septuagint, and prevailed upon Aquila and other scholars to attempt a new Greek translation.

But for Christians, it was the Septuagint that has come down to us in various copies, which was the Divine Revelation to the Jews. Did not Christ quote it? Are not the "Scriptures" to which he constantly refers, the Septuagint? It was almost immediately translated into what is known as the Old Latin text, that is, the text which was formally adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. It is true that it abounded in so many mistakes, and was so faulty in other ways that Jerome attempted a revision; and perhaps it is this revision which is known as the Vulgate. I say perhaps, because Jerome also made a new translation from the "original" Hebrew, that is, the text upon which the Massorites based their labours—our present text. But I have not, so far, been able to obtain proof that this became eventually the text of the present Vulgate. So far as I can now adduce, the Vulgate is Jerome's revision of the Septuagint, known as the Old Latin, and it was mostly from this Old Latin text that our early English translators made their translations. Our Authorized Version of the Old Testament is not actually a translation from the Massoretic Hebrew text. It is a recension or a relash of pre-existing English translations

based mostly on Wyclif, Tyndale and Coverdale, who used the Old Latin (that is, a translation from the Septuagint) as a base for their labours, and compared it with Greek or German or other translations and they certainly did not trouble about the Hebrew text.

The present Revised Version is the Authorized Version compared with the Hebrew and altered accordingly. But as far as the "Divine" revelation is concerned, the only one we know now is the Septuagint, and not the present Hebrew text which was made many centuries later.

The reader can now see what a muddle everything is in the Biblical World, and why Christian scholars, most of whom, are, let us be generous enough to admit, sincerely anxious to get at the truth, are so terribly perplexed about the Septuagint. In fact—though I may have overlooked the reference—I was unable to find out from either the *Encyclopedia Biblica* or *Britannica*, if the Septuagint had ever been translated. Was this information deliberately suppressed? The man who translated it over 100 years ago was an American, Charles Thomson, and he used the *Codex Vaticanus*. I may deal with this translation and its implications in a future article.

H. CUTNER.

The Ecclesiastical Circus

(Concluded from page 156.)

THE conduct of those descendants of the lost host of Pharaoh, the Olympian sea lions (including their brawling during Divine Service) has afforded delight to thousands of circus visitors. In their practical zeal for the glory of God, they, however, sadly fall short of the standard set by their brethren of the Irish Sea in the days of St. Maedoc. It is recorded, that at the command of this Irish bishop, a sea-lion yoked itself to the monastery plough (the good saints' horses being at the local war), and turned over a great part of the lea-land of County Wexford. Having finished its agricultural duties, the sea-monster then took the Saintly man on a return Cross-Channel cruise to his old friend and trainer David of Wales, the national Saint, and noted marine rider. Varied with occasional salmon fishing in ploughed-field puddles, this form of sea-cruising seems to have been the favourite pastime of the Celtic saints. It may seem a little unjust on the part of the Almighty that a Hebrew prophet should be provided with a state-room inside the whale, while an Irish saint should have to ride astride his sea-lion. There are, however, compensating advantages, especially to an Irish bishop, in having charge of the helm when riding a monster.

Space does not permit an individual presentation of the worshipful company of feathered deities. Special mention must, nevertheless, be made of the "ghastly, grim, and ancient raven." This ominous bird's activities as the Divine Baker's roundsman to Elijah, and fishmonger to our own Cuthbert, commend him in an especial manner to our present hard-up Christian clergy; while, in prolonged periods of drought, such as the present, his croak added to the lugubrious priestly note, broadcast over the ether, could scarcely fail to produce a Noachian deluge. Those venerable clerics worn out in the service of the Lord, who object to treatment with monkey gland, as well as younger spiritual athletes seeking a *stimulus carnis* for the greater glory of the conquest, will find a decoction from the brains of this sacred bird, or its cousin the crow, a rejuvenator of unfailling potency.

As witness to the historicity of the crucifixion, the piscine world presents the living testimony of the

pike. Curiosity led this fish to look upon the sacred drama, and despite the low visibility and a few intervening hills it obtained and carries imprinted on its brow to this day, a photographic record of the instruments of crucifixion. The honour of bearing the divine stigmata, it shares with the cruciferous ass in the brute world; and among humans, that distinguished band of Christian neurotics headed by the epileptic Paul, with Mary Ann Girling, the English Shaker, at the tail-end. In the days of Tobias, when the liver was the seat of love, when mercy issued from the bowels, and the kidneys were the founts of good and evil, the sacrifice of its vital emotional and moral principles by the fish as recorded in the Book of Tobit, deserves a nobler recognition than the relegation of its story to the obscurity of the Protestant Apocrypha. The angelic revelation of the virtues of cod-liver-oil receives but scant acknowledgement also, with the interpolation of "Tobias nights" in its Douay Bible, by the firm world-famous for its oils. There is a picture, said to be by Murillo, of a shoal of fish engaged in "magnifying the Lord" with gaping mouth and watery eye, at the bidding of St. Anthony. As love is often blind to moral faults, so true piety, alike in prelate and in peasant, is often blind to the defects of art. Thus it is known that the venerable Father Christmas has been given the place of the Almighty amongst the household gods; and so too, it is said, the picture by Murillo has been successfully counterfeited by photographs of pious congregations taken beside the pulpits of certain emotional present-day preachers.

A delicate reticence, akin to Christian modesty, forbids any ostentatious display of one's intimacy with the parasitical world—rather should such acquaintance ever be pursued, like the searching of the heart, and communing with deity, in the privacy of one's closet. With the Christian conception of one Almighty Creator, however, the Lord of "Hosts" becomes equally the Prince of Parasites; and while few can read unmoved the story of the manifestation of the "finger of God" in the third plague of Egypt, the revelation of the "hidden presence" in the hair-shirt of the doubly-martyred predecessor of the present eminently hygienic Archbishop of Canterbury induces almost Pauline trembling. Professing to despise the worship of the ancient Greek gods, the Christian priests seek to retain the privileges, perquisites and revenues of the original priestly *parasiti*; of the two distinguishing badges of their predecessors in the days of the Greek comedy, the Christian clerics have discarded the tooth-comb, and re-consecrated the tonsorial ointment as a sacred chrism; banishing the symbolic mistletoe of the Druids, the Christian parasites maintain the fiction that they are the life force of the civilization, whose vitality in fact they sap. In the shadow of the Christian Church, the vermin-infested slum flourishes, however much the proverbial flea tickles the clerical ear. The Seraphic Francis claiming ecstatic brotherhood with the louse is deified; and the contemplative airy fungoid, the pillar-rooted Simon, has his maggots treasured as heavenly pearls.

As religious fervour nowadays seldom attains to the lycanthropic frenzy of apparel in pelts, and a diet of locusts and wild honey, an annual retreat to the glades of Whipsnade, or a leisurely visit to the more crowded ways of the London Zoo should prove salutary to the priests of the Divine Successor of the wild gods of the past. Engaged in the study of religious origins, they might thus repair to the serpent-house to ponder on the genesis of "re-birth" and "eternal life"; to behold, elsewhere, the "lions of Judah," accept the avamedhal sacrifice; to view at the elephant ride, in mimic epitome, the story of all religions, as they watch the children pay their coins to

wards the upkeep of the sub-god and his attendants, ere they mount the celestial steps to the living throne of the High-God Indra; to see the sacred bears fed with currant buns; to renew acquaintance with the stork that brought them hither; and to gaze upon the turkey-buzzard that will fly away with them if they are naughty.

Verily indeed, as the Bishop hath said, association with wild animals "touches religion rather beautifully."

HIBERNIAN.

Letters to a Country Vicar

THE Editor of this journal has *not* asked for a review of his latest book, but it seems to me a pity not to express some of the enthusiasm with which I read Mr. Chapman Cohen's *Letters to a Country Vicar*. My copy is the shilling edition: cheap only in price. It has a most attractive plain stiff paper cover, and about a hundred pages of well-printed good English conversational, readable "Letters."

Everybody knows that the art of good Letter-writing is rare. On its literary merits alone this book ought to be sure of a long life and a constant addition to its admiring readers.

All this has nothing to do with the subject-matter, but it is worth while turning out even a propagandist manifesto in a form which prejudices the casual reader in favour instead of against a Freethought book.

Of course the book ought to have an Index—all Mr. Cohen's books deserve one, but a good index means a big increase in cost of production. The first essential in so popularly written a book as this, is that its price should be as low as possible.

The author artfully draws us into some very easy reading (fitted, no doubt, to the country vicarages of our land). But soon the familiar persuasiveness of the agile author lures us into deep waters. Mr. Cohen is never more uncompromising than when his facile writing fascinates us most.

This is a little book. It cannot give encyclopædic treatises on every one of the subjects it deals with, but there is no sense of fragmentation, and no writing-down or whittling-away of any essential statement.

Herein one may pleasantly read and permanently cherish a thoughtful teacher's consideration of the alleged "moral greatness" of Jesus, of the "humbug" of modernist interpretations, of the implications which render the old Greek moral "laws" superior to the Christian ethics. There are admirably concise references to what Christianity stands for in history, to the significance of modern scientific research in relation to the idea of God and a soul, and to the real meaning of personality.

The "Vicar" flatteringly said that Mr. Cohen "has successfully smashed the anthropomorphic God." One of Mr. Cohen's best "Letters" is No. 5, wherein he shows that this flattery deceives chiefly the generous donor of it himself. The Vicar's "modernism" is shown to be every whit as "anthropomorphic" as the most benighted fundamentalism ever was.

This Letter V. is likely to be continuously serviceable to Freethought advocates. Its crushing logic ought to be useful in the war with the conceited "modernists." Mr. Cohen truly says they are "modernist" rather than "up to date," a distinction involving a genuine difference.

There are, of course, those who must be called "scientists," who "call something God, exactly as we might choose to call the petrol pump, God," and Mr. Cohen regards these scientists as "using a mere formula expressed in old-fashioned language instead of in algebraic symbols." This is aptly and convincingly put, and the complete context makes this Letter V. a notable contribution to a little considered phase.

There is a particularly useful reference, in Letter II. to the scientific attitude towards various ideas respecting Christ. Mr. Cohen does not proceed on the old basis of weighing each separate miracle or story or teaching, nor

of discussing its truth, but suggesting instead "enquiring into the origin of these beliefs, into the nature of the conditions that have led to their partial transformation as they are met in the New Testament, and the conditions that have led to their perpetuation down to our own time. Religion becomes a department of anthropology and social history." This was worth saying, and saying it so succinctly and freshly.

In two of the Letters, the author clearly explains to the Vicar, WHY the God-incarnate idea is dropped, and why the moral reformer is brought to the front. It cannot be too often emphasized that Christianity is a Religion: not a system of ethics.

The "Problem of Evil" is glanced at in Mr. Cohen's informative way, and the doctrine of the "Consolation" of religion is put into its proper place.

It is impossible to do more than indicate thus a few of the many aspects of religion and thought referred to in these eight "Letters." The book is characterized as a *Freethinker* reader might expect, by clearness of statement, a reasonable judgment based on a sound scientific foundation, a courteous response to the "Vicar's" equally courteous invitation, and above all a convincing refutation of the supposition that any kind of religion, old or new, can help mankind in the essential problems of life.

In a sense this is by far the "simplest" of all the books Mr. Cohen has written. That is its charm. But to be simple is not to be superficial. These Letters are quite as "profound" as if a polysyllabic terminology had rendered profundity unintelligible to the ordinary reader.

Some passages of the "Letters" have real eloquence, probably unintended, as the chapters are authentic "Letters," and the fine literary sense is natural, not superimposed. Most of us hope to see many more equally acceptable "Letters" from the same pen.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

Correspondence.

THE QUESTION OF FREEDOM.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Permit me to thank Mr. M'Intyre for having made a protest, in the *Freethinker* for March 11, against the habit of treating the dictatorship of Stalin as being in the same category as the dictatorship of Hitler and Mussolini. There is no justification for such a treatment, unless it be when one takes a convenient abstract principle of dictatorship and ignores historical development. This seems to be a favourite method with a large percentage of Freethinkers, especially when they speak of what they call the lack of freedom in Russia, and proceed to boast of the wonderful freedom which we enjoy in England. Is *our* freedom so remarkable when it is not firmly entrenched, and can be swept away in a few hours if those in power think it needful to sweep it away, and they choose the right time?

Again, can you attack the existing system in England with full freedom of criticism, and, if so, why were Pollitt and Tom Mann arrested a few days ago?

Surely it is time Freethinkers talked less about abstract freedom and more about actually possible social freedom such as will lead to less and less exploitation of man by man. The Moscow road leads to this form of society, the German and Italian roads lead to human degradation and large-scale slavery.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

[Mr. Egerton Stafford completely mistakes the point at issue. The question of the relative value of dictatorships is not in question. Some are obviously better than others, both in terms of aim and operation. But a dictatorship which forbids and punishes criticism of an existing system, whether in religion or in economics is one against which all *Freethinkers* must protest. No one has ever claimed in the *Freethinker*, that "full freedom of criticism" exists in England, but it is still true that one can in England criticize, within tolerably wide limits, every institution from the Crown downward. There are financial difficulties, and there is the boycott, and there is the somewhat elastic law

against incitement to a breach of the peace; but the fact remains that in England, papers are maintained, books and pamphlets written, and speeches delivered against existing economic, social, and religious institutions and beliefs, of a kind and in a manner that is permitted by neither Hitler, Mussolini, nor the Soviet. To say that one dictatorship is preferred to another, or that the dictatorship of a party is to be preferred to the dictatorship of an individual is to say something that is quite beside the point at issue. The remark that our freedom may be "swept away in a few hours if those in power think it needful to sweep it away, and they choose the right time," is too cryptic for my understanding. —EDITOR.]

THE VICTORIAN ERA.

SIR,—No doubt my readers will be wondering why I picked out the Duchess of Sutherland as an example of a wealthy Victorian. I did not. I mentioned the Duchess in connexion with the story that when the Queen paid her a visit, the Queen remarked that she had "left her home to visit the Duchess in her Palace." The story makes the Duchess the possessor of a country seat, a steam yacht, and a Villa on the Riviera, which I know nothing about, and in any case would have belonged to the Duke. I ascribed these possessions to many of the wealthy Victorians, and not to the Duchess in particular.

W. MANN.

CHURCH AND STAGE.

Carolina was a celebrated German actress, whose career was a histrionic landmark leading to a tremendous improvement in the stage, intellectually, artistically and morally. Largely through her pioneer work under great difficulties the theatre was brought definitely up from the mountebanks' booth at the fair ground, into the realm of the fine arts during the eighteenth century.

Speaking of the last phase of her life when age and financial struggles brought her to the end of her career, Miss Rosamund Gilder relates:—

This was her last period of comparative happiness and success. Troubles chiefly financial accumulated at every step. . . : Again the troupe disbanded and its members went their several ways. For a while Carolina appeared in a Vienna theatre as an hired actress, but her style was already outmoded and she had no success. She wandered about Germany with Neuber, acting, teaching, and picking up a precarious living until a kind friend in Dresden offered the impoverished couple a room in his house. There the faithful and serviceable Neuber died after forty years of comradeship, leaving Carolina completely alone. A year later she was again homeless, driven out of this last refuge by the accidents of war. Sixty-three years old and almost destitute, she knocked at the door of a peasant's house just outside the town of Laubergast near Dresden. The man at first refused to take her in, knowing her to be one of that dangerous breed of play-actors, but in the end his kindness of heart conquered and he received her into his house. There she died on November 30, 1760, maintaining to the end a dignity and kindness that won the hearts of the simple folk around her. Her unwilling host had learned to love and respect her, and in spite of the prohibition of the Church, managed to bury her in a remote corner of the local graveyard. He had to do it at night, lifting her coffin over the wall and digging the grave himself, for the priest would give no sanction or blessing to the burial of an actress. Sixteen years later, a memorial was erected on the highway at Laubergast to Germany's first important actress manager, the innovator and reformer Frederika Carolina Neuber, who had as the inscription on the monument proclaims, "introduced good taste on the German stage."

Enter the Actress, by Rosamund Gilder (Geo. Harrop & Co.).

WATCH AND PRAY.

The man who is honest from fear will seldom be wanting in the cunning that waits on opportunity for the big coup. His virtuous season will serve as his novitiate, during which he will develop the necessary talents, and study the most suitable ways and means.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Sunday, B. A. Le Maine. 3.30, Platform 1, Messrs. Collins and Bryant. Platform 2, B. A. Le Maine. 6.30, Various speakers. Wednesday, 7.30, Messrs. Collins and Le Maine.

INDOOR.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (New Morris Hall, Hall No. 5, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham, S.W.4): 7.30, Mr. B. C. Boulter (Socialist Christian League)—"The Bond Between Christianity and Socialism."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"Social Changes in America."

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): 8.0, Mr. A. D. McLaren—"Obscurantism."

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Reggiori's Restaurant, 1 Euston Road, opposite King's Cross Station): 7.30, Mr. William Nicholls—"How the Financial Machine Works."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Independent Labour Party Rooms, 133 Forest Lane, Forest Gate end): 7.30, Mrs. E. Venton—"Women and Christianity."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Council Schools): 7.0, Mr. R. H. Rosetti—"Dictators, People and Persecution."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Godwin Commercial Hotel, Godwin Street): 7.0, Mr. T. W. Green—"The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ."

BURNLEY (St. James' Hall, S.D.F. Rooms): 11.0, Mr. H. P. Turner—"Passover, Crossover or Crucified?"

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Ritual of Morality."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Woodside Hall, Glenfarg Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Mr. George Whitehead (London)—"Marxian and Other Interpretations of History." A Social will be held in the D. and F. Rooms, Glasgow Cross, at 7.30 p.m., Saturday, March 17. *Freethinker* and other literature on sale at all meetings.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. E. Harry Hassell—"Religion, Sex and Rationalism."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, Islington, Liverpool, entrance in Christian Street): 7.0, Mr. E. S. Wollen—"God and His Next War."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Clarion Cafe, Market Street, Manchester): 7.30, Mrs. Janet Chance—A Lecture.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE (Socialist Club, Arcade, Pilgrim Street): 2.30. Meeting of Delegates and friends of North East Branches of N.S.S. Bigg Market: 7.0, A meeting, weather permitting.

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