

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	<i>Page</i>
<i>On Freedom.—The Editor</i> - - - - -	209
<i>The Round-up of Romanism.—Mimnermus</i> - - - - -	210
<i>God and Nature.—W. Mann</i> - - - - -	211
<i>Letters to a Country Vicar.—Medicus</i> - - - - -	212
<i>Modern Youth.—Dorothy Sinclair</i> - - - - -	213
<i>America's First Freethinkers.—G. Adolf Koch, M.D.</i> - - - - -	214
<i>The Great Blasphemy Case.—D.</i> - - - - -	218
<i>Dickens, Shelley and Atheism.—W. Kent</i> - - - - -	219
<i>To Hell with your Wars.—C. J. Read-Harrison</i> - - - - -	220
<i>More Misfits.—J. Reeves</i> - - - - -	221
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions.

On Freedom

ONCE more I am interrupting my series of notes on controversial terms to deal with another subject of more pressing importance. It is becoming quite clear that one of the great issues, not merely before this country, but before the whole civilized world, is that of individual liberty. And inasmuch as a settlement of this question will depend to a very considerable extent upon the prevalence of clarity of thought, it may be that this article will not be so much of an interruption of my other articles as might appear at first sight. And the right to individual freedom of thought and publication is something for which this journal stands and for which the Freethought Movement has always fought.

In saying this I am not blind to the fact that the belief in individual liberty is not antagonistic to some amount of individual restraint. It is, finally, social interference that guarantees the right to individual freedom. It is only by marking the lines—variable with time and circumstance—beyond which interference may not go that the freedom of each is secured. I can only safely and peaceably own anything so long as the community guarantees non-interference on the part of others. Freedom of movement is also guaranteed only by restricting the freedom of each to interfere with each. It is fundamentally true that freedom does not mean the absence of restraints, restraints are necessary to its existence. It is when power is taken, or given, to individuals, or to bodies of individuals, to deny to others freedom of movement, of thought, or of speech, that tyranny comes into being and challenges the first principle of Freethought.

* * *

Spying in the Post Office

In the *Evening Standard* for March 29, "A Lawyer" calls attention to the extent to which the opening of private letters is carried on in the Post Office. Of course, everyone knows that letters are opened in the Post Office, there exists, as a matter of

fact, a special department for that purpose. Prominently the fact has come before the public in connexion with the Irish Sweepstake. In this case the tickets are thrown away, and when the letters contain money that is returned to the sender. There exists no power of confiscation. It should be explained that at English law an action may be positively or negatively illegal. In the first case the law prohibits and punishes. In the latter case the law simply will not enforce actions which are not punishable if people care to perform them. At law, the Post Office is a common carrier, licenced to do certain things, and in the doing of which it holds a monopoly. It therefore may refuse to carry a letter, and in that case the one who is aggrieved might appeal to the Courts to compel the Post Office to carry the letter. But it is quite certain that the decision of the Courts would be that inasmuch as sweepstakes are not legal in this country, it would not compel the Post Office to carry tickets or money for the purchase of tickets.

Now the Royal Commission on Sweepstakes and Betting reported that during 1932-3 the Post Office had actually opened 350,000 letters, and the Right Honourable gentleman who is at the head of the Post Office did not think that he was engaged in work of a very contemptible nature, although if he had caught one of his servants spying into his own correspondence he would probably have lectured him on the villainous nature of his conduct. It is certain that all the letters that were opened did not contain sweepstake tickets for there is no means of telling whether they do so or not. The 350,000 letters are just taken promiscuously, and their contents read by certain unnamed employees, a practice which opens the way for rather a pretty policy of blackmailing. We know that telephone messages may be tapped, and in consequence that no one who wishes to have a message really private ever sends one over the telephone. Now we know that one's private correspondence is open to the eyes of officials to an extent that the general public hardly think possible. The practice, thinks the writer of the article named, may be in the form in which it is carried on, be quite illegal. On that I cannot express a dogmatic opinion, although I have been under the impression that an order from a Secretary of State was required to open letters. But I am certain that no more contemptible practice can exist with either individuals or governments than this. It is an outrage on decency, and we have no right to rail at the spy system of other countries while we tolerate this kind of spying in our own.

* * *

More Illegalities

Here is another instance of what I am pretty certain is an altogether illegal interference with personal liberty. Under the existing law the publication of books or pamphlets or pictures may be prohibited on the grounds of their indecency, their blasphemous

character, or because they contain grossly libellous and slanderous matter. And where stocks are kept for sale they may also, on a court order, be seized. Now visitors to the Continent often bring home with them copies of books which have been prohibited here. In this case the Customs officials seize them on the ground that they are prohibited. But the law against these books applies only to their publication or sale, it does not apply to their possession. I may if I like plaster the walls of my room with the most indecent pictures possible; I may line my shelves with the most indecent of books, the law cannot touch me. But bringing home from the Continent a book such as the *Well of Loneliness*, or *Ulysses* is not publication, and whether I have it on my shelves or in my pocket makes no difference whatever. It is publication, not possession, that is the offence. I am quite sure that the Customs are—under orders—acting quite illegally. And there is in this case, and in the matter of the Post Office, required a public body that would take up such cases and fight them in the Courts. The power of the Courts have in recent years been somewhat curtailed, but there is still enough freedom left for them to act, and to act decisively.

If I may mention my own experience. During the war one or two playwrights, Mr. Miles Malleson among them, indiscreetly depicted German soldiers as ordinary human beings, and both German and British soldiers as horrified at the horror of the war. These plays, and quite a number of books and pamphlets were suppressed under the war-time regulations. But the officials went further, trusting to a state of war. They issued a public notice through the press to the effect that those who had any of these publications in their possession would be well-advised to hand them over to the police, otherwise they might find themselves in serious trouble. So far as I know the *Freethinker* was the only paper that pointed out that the notice was sheer loush. I did more. I wrote the issuing authority stating what suppressed publications I had, also that I had no intention of giving them up, and that I should resist any attempt to seize them. I heard nothing more of the subject. I had called the "Bluff," and that was an end of the matter. But it is certain that what we need is a public spirited body that would take up all such cases where individual rights are infringed by officialdom and fight the issue in the Courts.

* * *

Getting Ready for Despotism

But it is not easy to get this society formed. The papers having been stirred up against the autocracy of the narrow-minded ligots of the B.B.C. have, following the visit of Sir John Reith to the private meeting of the House of Commons, suddenly dried up. (One wonders what is the power *behind* Sir John Reith, and what has caused this sudden silence of the press?) Then there are cases reported from time to time in these columns, the quite arbitrary actions of chiefs of police, some of which we have been able to check, and the illegal conduct of petty magistrates and officials. In the circumstances I was the more pleased to find the following in Mr. J. B. Priestley's just issued *English Journey*:—

I cannot help feeling that this new England is lacking in character, zest, gusto, flavour, bite, drive, originality, and that this is a serious matter. Monotonous but easy work and a liberal supply of cheap luxuries might between them create a set of people entirely without ambition or any real desire to think or act for themselves—the perfect subjects for an iron autocracy.

That statement is, I think, fully justified by the existing situation. Ever since the war we have seen people getting more and more careless about the

scant freedom that had been won for them. The newspapers in their hunt for circulation, have seen to it that sports, games, competitions, gossip, and a host of perfectly worthless matters should take the place of any incitement to serious thought. The B.B.C. proves itself one of the dangers we have to genuinely educated thought by following the same plan on a higher scale, and with an avowed censorship, against which there would have been a fierce outcry fifty years ago. We are indeed paving the way for an iron autocracy and an iron autocracy is always fundamentally a military autocracy, since it can only maintain itself by brute force. It means the continuous elimination of the more independent types. The motive behind matters little. Good or bad, the result is the same. The tyranny of the Church and the fires of the *auto-da-fé* were kept in being by the urge of good motives. The mistaken zeal of "good" men have caused far more evil in the world than the calculated villainy of bad ones. The people are receiving a drilling, from drill-masters of various kinds, in the goodness of blind obedience to official orders, and many will only discern its full influence when it is too late. I think that Mr. Priestley is right—we are creating perfect subjects for an iron autocracy. I think, also, that it is unlikely that freedom will be destroyed by its enemies. If it occurs it will be due to the weakness and timidity of its friends.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Round-up of Romanism

"Liberty, a word without which all other words are vain."—*Ingersoll*.

"The vain crowds, wandering blindly, led by lies."—*Lucretius*.

THE Roman Pontiff must always interest Freethinkers. For the Pope of Rome is the ecclesiastic who addresses the largest congregation in the world. Compared with this Papal dignity other archbishops seem petty and parochial. Using the patter of his profession, a Pope utters words which are listened to in Bolivia and Bermondsey, in Stockholm and Streat-ham. The rhetoric may be enfeebled and the platitudes exhausted, but the patriarch possesses something of the tragic character of Tithonus, "immortal age without immortal youth." His unique position with regard to the huge number of men and women who hold their rule of faith from the largest of the many Christian Churches is striking, and nothing was more remarkable than the late Pope's attitude during the Great War. Unlike the Archbishop of Canterbury and other prelates, he never made an ass of himself by including national flags and machine-guns among the sacred emblems of the Christian religion, and he again and again deplored the loss of millions of lives. That his warning was treated with contempt by Catholic Christians was not his fault, and the Pope was spared nothing that the power of militarism and the supine inattention of the religious would could make him suffer. Publicly he stood, the King Lear of disobedient and ungrateful children, shrill in his menaces, but keeping unimpaired the dignity of paternity rejected.

The events of the Great War showed clearly the ebbside of the political power of the Papacy, and the bitterest comment on the daring diplomacy, which under Cardinal Rampollo, the Papal Secretary of State during a generation, sought untiringly for the means of restoring the Pope's temporal power. It was Rampollo who suggested the Romish Church's remarkable flirtations, first with Republicanism, and

afterwards with Socialism. When Leo XIII. died Rampollo would have been elected to succeed him but for the veto of the Emperor of Austria, which was communicated to the conclave by a Polish cardinal. While the cardinals hesitated to accept the veto, Rampollo himself accepted it, another Pope was selected, and Rampollo's dream ended. He lived thenceforward in retirement, his diplomatic combinations fell to pieces, and with the outbreak of the Great War went the last hopes of the political predominance of the greatest and most powerful of all the Christian Churches.

The decline and fall of the Roman Catholic Church has been a slow process. There was a time when she was more in harmony with her environment. She once had her intellectual wing, her scholars, her statesmen, even her thinkers, who found her borrowed mummeries and stolen creeds susceptible of mystical interpretation. The ignorant, bigoted, evangelical party prevailed gradually over these, and exterminated them by fire and sword, rack and gibbet, leaving themselves more ignorant and more bigoted than before, until by slow and sure degrees the whole Romish Church was made over to their leprous likeness.

It took centuries to produce this result. The very triumphs of Freethought throughout Europe directly contributed to this end. Every Romanist who became a Freethinker assisted and hastened this process. The more brains that were drawn out of the Catholic Church the more did the huge mass part with its intellectual leaven, and flatten down to a mere mass of intolerance and superstition. What constitutes the obstructive character of the Roman Catholic Church is the gulf which now separates it from the highest intelligence around it, the live, alert brains of science, and the leaden, moveless stereotype of dogma. To-day the voice of the Romish Pontiff, at which monarchs once trembled and obeyed, attracts as little attention in intellectual circles as last year's newspapers.

Growing indifference to religion in all its forms is the order of the day. As belief has waned in England, the Anglican State Church, "as by law established," has sought more and more to "play the sedulous ape" to Rome. The Anglo-Catholics have taken part possession of the so-called Church of England. Maybe they have not yet done all that was dreaded by timid Free Churchmen, but they rule the ecclesiastical roost, and the Bench of Bishops is divided against itself. At this hour there are covered by the umbrella of this English State Church men who hold the extremest doctrine of the freedom of the individual, and creatures who are willing to submit to the utmost practice of priestly control. How long will this battle between Tweedledum and Tweedledee last? That a large and increasing number of the Anglican clergy were coquetting with Rome roused some years ago, attention in the Romish Church, and the then Pope had some idea of reconverting English Churchmen, and of reimposing the yoke which our ancestors threw off centuries ago. But even ecclesiastical patriarchs cannot force the clock back, and the English people still, as a nation, refuse to acknowledge Rome's impudent sovereignty, and bear with the lesser evil of the priests of the State religion.

In darkened and superstitious times the power of the Roman Catholic Church was great, but it finished here with the glare of the fires of Smithfield and Stratford. It was never at any time so unquestioned and unresisted as in Italy, Spain, Austria, France and Ireland. There is a wholesome obstinacy in British blood, which is cooler than that of the Latin races. It shows itself whenever the whip is cracked too loudly, as Charles the First and James the Second

realized to their cost, and as the long contest for the freedom of speech and the press also proves.

Priestcraft can never do its worst again in England. We shall never again, as a people, permit the cesspool of the confessional, nor submit to the poisoned weapons of Priestcraft, its hypocritical affectations of celibacy, its tyranny in the home, its officiousness in public affairs, its menace and robbery at the death-bed. Even the stolid English farmers are at long last awaking to the tyranny of the "sacred-tenth" tax on agriculture. Priestcraft had never a perfectly safe seat on British shoulders even in the Ages of Faith and Ignorance, before the days of the Protestant Reformation and the Free Churches. It is an impossible dream now that there is an organized national Freethought Party, which has inscribed on its banners that significant and soul-stirring Voltairean phrase, "Crush the Infamous." It is well, for few worse misfortunes can befall any people than that of possessing a narrow-minded priestly caste in its midst that exploits the people and hinders the wheels of progress. The very word "reverend," in the case of the clergy, is pure, unadulterated humbug. To apply it to the ordinary parson, or purse-proud prelate, is as absurd and ridiculous as to apply the term, "All Highest" to the pious posturer who once lorded it over the German people:—

"The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear,
And naked shingles of the world."

MIMNERMUS.

God and Nature

"We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause
Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate."

J. Thomson "B.V." "The City of Dreadful Night."

"Nature, with equal mind,
Sees all her sons at play;
Sees man control the wind
The wind sweep man away
Allows the proudly-riding and the foundering bark."

Matthew Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna."

"Next to the greatness of these cosmic forces, the quality which most forcibly strikes everyone who does not avert his eyes from it is their perfect and absolute recklessness. They go straight to their end, without regarding what or whom they crush on the road."

J. S. Mill, "Three Essays on Religion."

How often we have been told to "look through Nature up to Nature's God," to see the finger of God in a glorious sunrise or sunset, in a charming landscape, or beautiful flowers.

This argument would be more effective if all the products of Nature were of this type; but they are not. For everything good and beautiful there is an antithesis of evil and ugliness. The main characteristic of Nature is its supreme indifference as to the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly, and the pain or happiness of the creatures she brings forth from her infinite fecundity.

Take, for instance the wasteful manner in which Nature provides for the continuance of life on the earth. The American oyster produces sixty million eggs, but the Ling far surpasses this with one hundred and fifty million eggs! If all these spawn were fertilized and escaped their natural enemies until they came to adult size, the oceans would very soon be chocked solid with fish.

Insects and animals are nothing like so prolific, but unless their numbers are kept down by their enemies they soon outdistance their food supply and are devastated by famine. Take the Lemming for example, a small vegetable feeding rodent, a species of vole about five inches long, which abounds in the plateaus of Norway and Sweden. This small furry creature is so fecund that every few years—the average is about four—it outstrips the available food. Then it migrates in enormous numbers towards the sea, causing great destruction in its path. Nothing can stop them or deflect them from their way. Although they greatly dislike water, yet they swim the rivers they meet with. They are followed by a host of eagles, wolves, foxes and other carnivora; and at last, after a journey which may last from one to three years, according to the distance from the sea, those who have survived plunge into the water and swim until they sink. Not one of them ever returns.

Among insects the Locusts—tropical grasshoppers—are enormously prolific, they also make periodical migrations, causing enormous damage. In 1881, in Cyprus, thirteen hundred tons of eggs were collected and destroyed. In South Africa, in 1906, the damage they caused was estimated at £1,000,000. Vast swarms measuring twenty miles by sixty, and taking several days to pass, screen the sun and throw a pall of darkness over the land. Mr. Heape cites:—

Carruthers' account of a swarm, 2,000 square miles in extent, passing over the Red Sea. The estimated weight of the insects composing this swarm, at an average of 1/16 oz. per insect, amounts to 42,850 million tons! While a second swarm, perhaps even larger, passed in the same direction (I gather this was easterly) the next day. In the case of another swarm, which invaded Cyprus in 1881, 1,300 tons of eggs were collected and destroyed, and yet in 1883 at least as many more were deposited there. The number of individuals concerned in these stupendous emigration movements is almost beyond the power of realization; and in all such cases of true emigration in mass the end is extinction. (W. Heape: *Emigration, Migration and Nomadism*, p. 138.)

Mankind is no more exempt from over-population than the lower creatures. The ever-present threat of famine hangs like the sword of Damocles over the crowded populations of India and China, where large families are the rule. In India it is only barely avoided by the constant development of irrigation by the building of dams and reservoirs under British supervision, to increase the area of food-producing land. Notwithstanding this there was famine in India in 1837-8; 1860-1; 1865-6 and 1899-1901. In the latter instance 1,000,000 perished in spite of the Government's £10,000,000 on relief and putting 4,500,000 on relief works, otherwise there would have been a larger death-roll. In the Great Bengal Famine 10,000,000 perished.¹ China suffers in the same way every few years, in fact some part of China is nearly always famine stricken.

This growth of population over the available supply of food has been the most prolific source of war. Peoples who live by hunting, or grazing cattle, require large tracts of land so that when they exhausted the hunting, or the grazing, they could move to fresh pastures, or game land. This often brings them into collision with other tribes and fighting ensues. For instance, in the thirteenth century the tribes inhabiting Mongolia were at chronic warfare with one another from this cause until Genghis Khan established his supremacy over all the others and decided that it would be more profitable to fight and despoil other people than to fight among themselves. Accord-

ingly he raised a great army with which he over-ran and conquered China, India, Russia, Persia, Hungary and Poland. As Roosevelt has observed: "Few conquests have ever been so hideous, and on the whole so noxious to mankind. The Mongols were savages as cruel as they were brave and hardy."²

The self-same cause led to the overthrow of the magnificent Roman Empire, largely because the Christian converts declined to defend their country, all their interests being concentrated on saving their souls. Over population is the cause of war to this day; it was this that caused the Russian-Japanese War over Manchuria which Russia was about to annex. Japan, a fully populated island, must find an outlet for her surplus and growing population. She is denied admission to Australia, America and South Africa, it was therefore of vital importance that Manchuria should remain open to her people and her trade. That is the cause of the recent fighting there, and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

If, as we are told, nature is ruled or controlled by a God, then God is responsible for all the horrors due to this tendency of population to increase over the supply of food; and the only remedy is Birth Control, but here, as usual religion bars the way, the Pope has declared vehemently against it, and our own beautiful Bishop of London, on February 13, declared in the House of Lords concerning contraceptives: "I would like to make a bonfire of them all and dance round it." And of such are the Kingdom of Heaven.

W. MANN.

² J. Curtin: *The Mongols: A History*. p. xii.

Letters to a Country Vicar

ONE of the best testimonials to the high esteem in which knowledge is held to-day, consists in the fact that controversialists can think of no more damaging argument against an opponent than to say he is out of date. There is something ironically amusing about this argument when it comes from a clergyman. It is introduced with such evident gusto that we guess at the intense satisfaction felt by one who is able to occupy the position he has always envied in his opponent. With every decade a grounding in science becomes more clearly acknowledged as an essential part of cultural equipment, and however much the Church has disparaged knowledge in the past, the minister of to-day has a healthy respect for it. As we know, recent contributions to religious controversy by such scientists as Jeans and Eddington have cast upon theology a glamorous semblance of ultra-modernity, and the fashionable attitude for the clergy to-day is to say that Freethought is at last out of date. Nothing pleases them better. Freethought has fulfilled its function. The bitter obloquy of the Victorian Church is renounced; in fact the modern parson goes so far as to apologize for it. Now that he is safe he is seized with remorse, and hastens to give credit to the sceptics of the past for the great service rendered to the world. Freethought is dismissed with grateful thanks. If the *Country Vicar*, to whom Mr. Cohen's *Letters* are addressed is of this type, they must make exceedingly uncomfortable reading. Their distinguishing feature lies in the fact that they are right up to date in every sense of the term, and they derive from this a character considerably more damaging to religion than any Freethought of yesterday. Right from the start Mr. Cohen is at grips with modern apologetics. He commences at the New Testament, and before long has got down to the fundamental challenge to religion, as such, of all times and places.

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica* (14th Ed.) Article "Famine."

There is one particularly pleasing feature about his method of controversy; he never haggles over subordinate issues, never wastes time with pettifogging squabbles over non-essentials, merely for the sake of scoring a debating point. The reader is quickly made aware that the author's attention is riveted on the substance of the case, that he has completely grasped this himself, and that he will not permit the argument to depart from it even if his opponent plays into his hands on some minor issue. One feels all the time that he has taken trouble to understand not so much what his adversaries say as what they mean, and that he would never be content to reply to anything but the best of that. This great honesty imparts to his controversy a tremendous strength, for he is evidently evading nothing, hiding behind no sophistry, and it becomes equally impossible for others to do so. It is probably owing to this that Mr. Cohen is singularly avoided by the clergy in debate.

The *Letters* are, of course, written to a country vicar, but their chief use, to my view, is in the hands of Freethinkers. I do not think they will be welcome in many country vicarages. The service they render to Freethought is to provide us with a map. They constitute a survey by an expert surveyor. I have never reviewed any of Mr. Cohen's works without feeling compelled to comment upon his grasp. The more I read of his writings the more clearly I see that their striking orderliness comes directly out of the native orderliness of his mind. It is evident that he simply thinks with a pen; there is no effort to arrange his thoughts. In the *Letters* this impression of spontaneity is more than usually vivid, because they are in truth letters, conveying a full impression of the spoken word. We can hear the author talking as we read, and the illusion is exceedingly pleasant. When I say that we are provided with a map, I am thinking of a map as a chart whose foremost purpose is to show us the relationship between places, enabling us to find our way about. Our libraries are not short of books dealing first with one and then another place, taking us on a desultory tour through the realms of religious controversy. But we do not possess many books, at all events small books, which take us up in a balloon, and give us a bird's-eye view of the scene. This Mr. Cohen does in less than a hundred pages of print. The feat is all the more praiseworthy when we remember that the *Letters* arose out of correspondence from the Vicar, and have been cleverly blended by the author so as to unfold themselves in perfect sequence into a perfect whole. I say without hesitation that between the covers of this small book Mr. Cohen deals effectively with every material aspect of religious controversy. Mr. Bedborough has said that the book contains no index. It is an index.

It is frequently said of Mr. Cohen that he makes profound things appear simple. I cannot altogether agree with this. If by profound we mean muddled, then he makes them simple in so far as he unravels the knot, renders order out of confusion. But if by profound we mean deep, then Mr. Cohen's function is that of a diver. He goes down and brings the matter to the surface, placing it before us so that we may ourselves view its intrinsic simplicity. Thus he does not make things appear simple; he just shows us how simple they are. Nowhere better than in the *Letters* is this service performed. Mr. Cohen is profound; yes. And simple; agreed. But there is no antinomy. He illustrates the principle that the complex is derived from the simple, and overlays it. The complex is on top, the simple deep down. That is why he is able to say so much in so little space. The deeper he goes the less there is to say. Others are bemused by infinite harangues on the surface, enmeshed in a network a thousand times entangled.

And in the end their frantic struggles so muddy the water that all hope of seeing beneath is gone. That is when we have to send for the diver.

To me this is one of the main lessons of Mr. Cohen's latest book. It has been given before, perhaps nowhere better than in his *Determinism or Freewill*. But it is a lesson that bears repetition. This time we are in touch not with a specific aspect of Freethought but with the whole. Of necessity the treatment has to be more general, but nothing is lost thereby. The author reminds me very much of a skilful artist who is able, with the broad touch, to give us as perfect an impression of reality as if he had painted in detail. He does this by selecting essentials of light and shade. So it is with Mr. Cohen. He attacks his subject, as the artist would say, in masses, and by keeping to the correct proportions and stressing the colours in the correct degree, gives us a complete and satisfying picture of the Freethought position in 1934. His manner of speaking is intimate, friendly but firm. He is not harsh but he does not mince matters. He is comprehensive and convincing. We cannot afford to be without this book.

MEDICUS.

Modern Youth

THE suggestion is constantly being made in print and in speech that modern youth is cynical, is blasé, is disillusioned—has nothing to hold on to or to hope for and always, either tucked away in a corner or openly proclaimed, is the suggestion that a lack of religion is at the root of all these evils. "Modern Youth" implies infancy or early childhood during the period 1914-18; to some of us who were grown-up or growing up during those years the suggestion that a lack of religion is responsible for anything but greater self-reliance and a more courageous mind is rather ridiculous. If a census could be taken of the religious opinions of those at present between the ages of 35 and 45, showing how many had any "faith" at the age of say 17, how many had lost it before that (the expression "got rid of it" is perhaps preferable to "lost it"), how many still have faith and how many manage quite comfortably without, it would make interesting reading. Lack of religion is not a new thing, it did not develop because of the war as these speakers and writers imply. If it had done so, surely it should be the people who were then grown-up that were disillusioned and became cynical as a result for they would have been the ones who lost their religion, not the babies and children in the nursery.

No, what is wrong with Modern Youth if anything (and this is so generally assumed that it is difficult to avoid the infection) is rather the state to which religion and its attendant evils, poverty and monopoly, have brought the world than any lack of superstition and faith. One meets a fair number of young people, and they don't seem desperately unhappy or conscious of any lack, except the lack of security in their profession or job.

That there is a difference to be felt in the War babies no one would deny, and the only argument is whether it is for better or for worse. Perhaps it is that difference that the religious-minded feel and resent, resent because they realize that modern youth doesn't care a pin for their approval or disapproval. Perhaps also, it is because youth of to-day does and says, openly, things that their mentors would have liked to do and say in their own youth had they had the courage, and had their minds not been shackled by this religion that they would like to fasten on the young again. It is probably a sort of jealousy that resents freedom of any kind.

Restlessness is another charge frequently brought against the young—it goes well with the wild remarks about cocktail parties which imply that the modern girl spends her life in rushing from one cocktail party to another. (It is considered more reprehensible in a girl

apparently, since one rarely hears moralizing remarks about the cocktail-drinking young man). The truth is that only about one girl in fifty has ever been to a cocktail-party, let alone frequented them. No doubt one would find a much higher percentage among "Society" girls, but does that matter very much? They have nothing else to do anyhow. In any case cocktail parties are not the lurid, dangerous gatherings that one would imagine them to be from the tone of writers and speakers on the evergreen subject of modern youth. They are generally innocuous affairs the excitements consisting of a bottle or two of sherry and some gin and vermouth mixed and weakened with a great deal of orange juice. It may be that olives and small sausages impaled on orange sticks are more vicious than they look, but it is difficult to see how even the most rabid believer in religion could come to much harm from them.

It is easy to understand the anxiety of the clergy, after all it is their living, and if congregations and subscriptions go down, where are they? But in the case of the layman or laywoman, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that it is plain, ugly hatred of something they have never had that lies at the bottom of their complaints about modern youth, "I never had the chance so why should you?" is the motto of the soured and disappointed of either sex, and is surely one of the most unpleasant attitudes anyone can adopt.

The odd thing about this anxiety for the young is that none of these speakers or writers seem to realize that their anxiety is no newer than the lack of religion they moan about, for people have complained about modern youth for centuries. No doubt Adam and Eve and Mr. and Mrs. Noah felt just the same. The young will never please the old, and probably have never done so, but oh! for a little toleration—understanding would be too much to hope for from the religious—or, failing that, a little silence on the subject.

DOROTHY SINCLAIR.

America's First Freethinkers

I SHALL not have much to say in this article about the religious liberalism of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Gouverneur Morris, James Kent, and other distinguished Americans of the eighteenth century, whom many of us associate with the early days of Freethought in America. These men and the stories of their lives are either well known to us, or are at least readily available. My story will concern itself with those relatively unknown liberals, particularly Elihu Palmer and Ethan Allen, America's first militant, anti-Christian Freethinkers.

Every American schoolboy has probably heard of Ethan Allen, leader of the Green Mountain Boys and hero of Ticonderoga. But who knows that he was also the author of a 477-page volume with a long title, the beginning of which reads, *Reason the Only Oracle of Man?* This book was published in Bennington, Vermont, in 1784, and is described in the Library of Congress catalogue as "the first formal publication, in the United States, openly directed against the Christian religion."

From the point of view of Christian orthodoxy, this description is correct. He denied the divine authority of the Bible, and insisted that "reason ought to control the Bible, in those particulars in which it may be supposed to deviate from reason." Or as he expressed it on one occasion more forcibly, if more crudely, "Was it not that we were rational creatures, it would have been as ridiculous to have pretended to have given us a Bible, for our instruction in matters of religion or morality, as it would to a stable of horses." He believed in neither the fall of Adam nor the atonement of Christ. We are the sharers neither of the sin of Adam nor in salvation by the blood of the Lamb but must finally adopt the old proverb, *viz.*, "every tub stands on its own bottom." The Christian epic, therefore, was no more sacred to Allen than the Hebraic tradition. "The doctrine of the Trinity is destitute of foundation, and tends manifestly to superstition and idolatry." "The doctrine of the Incarnation itself, and the virgin mother,

does not merit a serious confutation, and therefore is passed in silence, except the mere mention of it."

Allen's book is no great philosophical masterpiece, but it is interesting, and ought certainly to be known. You might well ask, Why haven't we ever heard of it? The answer is, in the first place, that the book is exceedingly rare, and therefore not readily available. There are, as far as we know, not more than half a dozen copies in existence. And secondly, an even better reason is that infidelity was exceedingly unpopular in America during the nineteenth century, and for that matter even to-day, as far as the masses of the people are concerned. It has been customary, as you all know, to emphasize the piety of the fathers of our country rather than their religious liberalism. School children, accordingly, have heard of the man who took Ticonderoga in the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress, but have never heard of the author of *Reason the Only Oracle of Man*.

An even more important Freethinker than Ethan Allen, but not known by name even to many professional American historians, was Elihu Palmer, also a native of Connecticut. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1787 and became a Presbyterian minister but not for long. He began preaching at Sheffield, Massachusetts, and apparently was a Liberal from the beginning. From there he went to Newtown, Long Island, where his pastorate lasted only six months. He then joined the Baptists in Philadelphia, only to be dispossessed of his pulpit in consequence of heretical teaching. This was in March, 1791. He and a few followers who seceded with him, then identified themselves with a "Universal Society" which John Fitch, the inventor of the steamboat, had recently founded. Palmer was asked to become its minister. Under the influence of this liberal association, Palmer went so far as to deny the divinity of Christ. Unitarianism at that time was regarded as deliberate blasphemy and a crime. Public indignation was aroused to a high pitch by Bishop White of the Episcopal Church. The owner of the building was forced to refuse the use of his building to the Universal Society, and Palmer had to flee the city to escape physical violence.

He sought refuge with a brother, an attorney in Western Pennsylvania, and read law under his direction. In the spring of 1793 he returned to Philadelphia and was admitted to the bar. Three months later, in the plague of yellow fever, he lost his wife and was himself deprived of sight. The orthodox ascribed his misfortune to punishment for his unbelief.

After a year in Georgia, he came to New York in 1794. The Tammany Society at that time was strongly pro-French and liberal in religion as well as in politics. They joined Palmer in the establishment of a Deistic Society, and he remained their leader until his untimely death of pleurisy in Philadelphia in 1806.

Palmer was an exceedingly eloquent preacher and an organizer of deistic societies. His beliefs were, if anything, even more radical than those of Ethan Allen. Of the Bible he said, "It contains a mixture of inconsistency and contradiction; to call which the *word of God*, is the highest pitch of extravagance: it is to attribute to the Deity that which any person of common sense would blush to confess himself the author of." He described organized religion as the product of "ambitious, designing, and fanatic men," who have taken advantage of human ignorance and superstition. Moses, Mahomet, and Jesus "were all of them impostors; two of them notorious murderers in practice, and the other a murderer in principle: and their united existence perhaps, cost the human race more blood, and produced more substantial misery, than all the other fanatics of the world." The whole Christian scheme of salvation seemed to Palmer both absurd and contradictory. "In vain do its advocates attempt to cover this transaction with the machinery of ghosts and supernatural agents. The simple truth is, that their pretended Saviour is nothing more than an illiterate Jew, and their hopes of salvation through him rest on no better foundation than that of fornication or adultery."

As these quotations indicate, Palmer was more militant in his denunciation of religious orthodoxy than his better known contemporaries. But the greatest differ-

ence between him and many well-to-do Liberals was that he was eager to convert the common man. As an anonymous correspondent, signing himself "A Rich Deist," expressed it: "Very few rich men; or, at least men in the higher grades of society, and who have received a liberal education, care anything about the Christian religion. They cast off the yoke of superstition themselves; yet, for the sake of finding obedient servants, they would continue to impose it on the poor."

Palmer was not popular with the upper classes, many of whom believed as he did. The difference between Liberalism and Radicalism is largely a social difference, and Palmer was a Radical. His faith in man was not measured by economic or social position. He had a boundless hope that, if men could once overcome tyranny in government and superstition in religion, the millennium would be just around the corner. "The sun of reason has begun to appear," he exclaimed, "dispelling the thick and almost impenetrable mists of ignorance and superstition, illuminating the most secret recesses of the mind, and will continue to increase in splendour, till it shine forth in one clear, unclouded and eternal day."

The blind Palmer was both an heroic and a tragic figure. Many of his principles have long since lost their novelty in wide acceptance, but when he died it was as the champion of a cause which had brought him only poverty and opposition. Times have changed a great deal during the century and a quarter which has elapsed since then, but Palmer's greatest enemy is still with us—the tendency towards traditionalism instead of facing our problems courageously without prejudice, and in the light of the ideal that all men may have the opportunity to lead the good life.

G. ADOLF KOCH, M.D. (U.S.A.)

Acid Drops

The *Sunday Chronicle* shows us Mr. Stanley Todd's very American picture of Jesus Christ, and calls it: "The Picture the World is Waiting to see." It is likely enough that Christians would be interested in any actual photograph depicting what the *Sunday Chronicle* calls "Christ As He Really Was." But neither Jesus nor photography existed in those days, in fact, there is a great deal of the "negative" in both cases. Even if a perfect picture of Jesus could be found to-day, it would require a miracle to recognize him. But we forget, the Rev. Morse Boycott "feels strongly" that Todd's Torso is it! Boycott believes that this "handsome splendid Christ is the right one." Mr. Boycott's adjectives, it will be noticed, avoid all allusion to accuracy or actuality in the likeness itself, in fact Mr. Boycott stresses what he evidently regards as the most important part of the picture: he says, "We have no difficulty in recognizing any picture of Him in a frame. . . . We know now how to prove the genuineness of the likeness."

What did "Our Lord" really look like? Nobody knows. Nobody has ever seen any likeness—in fact, if "Our Lord" never existed, this is not surprising. But anything connected with Jesus is good copy, as our great national newspapers found out long ago. When there is a dearth of beastly scandals and the news editor is at his wit's end finding copy, he knows a good boost of religion in some shape or form will keep the circulation up and bring joy to the heart of the advertisement manager. Hence the recent articles on the likeness of "our Lord." We can assert one thing definitely, any artist who made Jesus a picture of a typical Jew would be booted out of court. A genuine portrait of Christ must represent a golden-haired Aryan, immaculately clean, and as unlike a Jew as possible. Christians simply do not like being reminded that one half of them worship a Jew and the other half a Jewess.

"Unless we have imagination," says the *British Weekly*, we can never do justice to any great fabric of faith. We agree. But what the editor means is that

you have to have faith in order to have faith. Without faith, says the *British Weekly*, "the whole story of Jesus would be the story of another man who had run His head against this hard, unfeeling world" . . . "and as for the Holy Ghost"—well, everybody knows what the Holy Ghost appears to those who use their common-sense instead of accepting the "imagination" (alias faith) of moody monks, stupid scribes, and pretentious priests.

May 5 will be "National Bible Day" at the Crystal Palace. We hope fireworks in the evening will end the fun—pleasantly—in smoke. The object of this merriment is "to bear witness to the Holy Scriptures as fully inspired and wholly trustworthy." The "Bible Testimony Fellowship," which is organizing this Scripture Slogan Stunt could easily win all the publicity it wants by producing one single text signed by the author and authenticated by a couple of policemen. The "fellowship" would have to be careful to avoid the thousands of contradictory versions of the same texts. Holy Scripture may be "wholly trustworthy" if any of the "fellows" could tell us which of the "fully inspired" versions was the "trustworthy" one.

We learn that, for the "pastoral oversight" of Methodist young men and women studying at the Universities, the Methodist Conference appoints chaplains and ministers, resident in the University cities, who "fully recognize the importance of the duty assigned to them, and show lively concern for their charge." We quite believe this. For fear is a very strong emotion, and it is fear of losing their young clients that motivates the parson's "lively concern" for their spiritual welfare. And the fear is not altogether groundless, seeing that at the Universities the young people are in danger of coming into contact with various new ideas and viewpoints, many of which may be inimical to the narrow creed on which the young people were nourished. What the watch-dogs appointed by the Conference try to do is to prevent their young clients from benefitting fully from their contact with new points of view. At all costs they must be prevented from becoming "unsettled" in their "religious convictions."

With no opposition to face, the Christian Evidence Society, that gallant body of pious defenders of the faith, can print what they like; and their report for the year 1933 is a delightful performance marked with all its old-time nonchalance of truth. Of the Hyde Park meetings, the report declares that the Society "had, in many ways, the best results secured for many years past"—which can only mean that the "blatant" Atheist was converted in large numbers, or that huge crowds invariably attended the meetings, or that a continual flow of subscriptions came into the Society's coffers. Alas, not one Atheist reverently bowed the knee to Christ through the Christian Evidence Society, or offered him a silent prayer during the year 1933; many Christian Evidence Society speakers found it most disheartening to address their inspirational exhortings to a few girls and an errand boy; while the flow of subs. was painfully slow. Still we are sure there is room for the thoroughly crude Christianity preached by the Christian Evidence Society—a Christianity, we are glad to say, heartily endorsed by the Salvation Army and its intellectual disciples. Why don't the two organizations hitch up together?

Now that public opinion has been thoroughly roused on the question of slums, it is interesting to find so many of our prominent Christian leaders suddenly discovering that their abolition is really Christ's work. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the other day, for example, referred with pride "to the appeal which the Archbishops issued some time ago, in which they called upon all members of the Church to take an active part in the great campaign of clearing the slums and providing decent homes for our people." He even called this appeal "a very fitting result of our commemoration of the Oxford Movement," as if that fatuous attempt to revert back to the credulity of the early Christians was in the least degree concerned with genuine secular life.

Still it is good to record that even an Archbishop can turn away from the mansions in the sky and express disapproval of thousands of those on this earth, in which so many of his fellow-countrymen are condemned to live.

The Archbishop read out a message from the Prince of Wales—a message devoid, we were pleased to see, of any reference to God, Jesus and the Blessed Disciples, or even hinting that the work of abolishing the slums was pure Christianity, or that it would be Christ's first task if his second advent was due now. The Prince may be, for all we know, a hide-bound Trinitarian, but as a rule, the messages he sends to Church meetings are remarkably Secularistic. Is this just "tact"?

It is difficult to understand the mentality of those Christians who, with terrible poverty surrounding them, can subscribe generously to such a thoroughly useless "mission" as the "East London Fund for Work Amongst the Jews," which is now appealing for money. One of its objects is, "To bear witness to our Lord by personal contact with Jews"—and any one who has really been in "personal contact" either with a Gentile Christian, or an oily convert, need not wonder at the poverty of the actual conversions made. Thousands of pounds are spent trying to persuade some unfortunate Jew that Christ is the Messiah, backed up with the crudest and silliest arguments Christianity is capable of producing. The average Jew laughs to scorn these futile missions, but what a tragedy it is that hundreds of Gentiles can starve so as to bring one renegade Jew to Christ!

Mrs. Levertoff, writing in a Church weekly recently, admits that "those directly engaged in witnessing for Christ among the Jews have almost insuperable difficulties to face," but she does not say that two of the causes of the utter failure to convert Jews is their superior intellectual power in debate, and the infantile arguments used by the Christian "witnesses." We suggest that some of the missionaries try their hand first at demolishing the Freethought case against Christianity. When they can do that they may be able to meet an intelligent Jew just a little better armed.

No matter how reasonable a Christian may be or pretend to be during the greater part of the year, directly Good Friday comes along he immediately reverts back to type. Here is the grand peroration of one of Canon Newbolt's sermons:—

The Jesus of the New Testament is the victorious Christ whom St. John, in his vision saw riding the White Horse of triumph, leading the celestial chivalry, clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, whose name is called the Word of God. He is a Christ who leads his followers in a battle of giants, not merely an example for our imitation, but King of kings and Lord of lords, who hath, by His love and pity, obtained eternal redemption for us.

What a lovely image is evoked by Jesus riding a white horse "clothed in a vesture dipped in blood!" The average believing Christian is obsessed with blood and Christianity has left a trail of blood through its nineteen centuries of history. What a religion!

Viscountess Barrington, in the *Quarterly Review* praises (with considerable qualification) the fatuous "Group" movement. Nothing can be said in favour of this revivalist resuscitation which (allowing for date and locality) could not be matched in every similar religious orgy since Moody and Sankey's day. The "drawing-room" wheeze is no novelty whatever. The cash-nexus is never found for revivals amongst destitute and poor converts. Rich people are always being "bled" by some kind of priest. The *Quarterly* article appears to confirm the apocryphal story of "a Greats man aged 24, who as Atheist and Pantheist was converted by Buchman's influence." We should like this convert's name and address, but investigation would probably prove that a youth capable of being simultaneously "an Atheist and Pantheist," was also a meat-eater and vegetarian, a militarist and a pacifist. We learn with interest, but not astonishment, that "the sex question which at first figured in undue proportions at these meetings is now relegated to separate gatherings of men and women."

The Rev. George Hughes promises to make our streets more interesting—if the authorities permit. He believes the "Second Advent draweth nigh: the Coronation Day is at hand." And to give us Brighter Streets he recommends, not black or blue or khaki-shirts, but bigger and better ballyhoo. "He who is looking for the Coming of the Bridegroom," he says, "should be white-robed, holding in his hand a burning lamp, and having abundance of oil in his vessel." The worst of it is, our soul-less police would probably suspect an advertising stunt. This "Bridegroom" business always reminds us of the parson who concluded a Sermon on the Ten Virgins by asking: "Where shall we be found when the Bridegroom arrives? Awake with the wise virgins? Or sleeping with the foolish virgins?"

Spiritual Life is a fundamental journal. It knows the exact date when "God drew across the sky the signs of the Zodiac," and that "Christ rose on Easter Sunday 4,000 years later." Satan, we learn from the same authoritative source, was extremely annoyed about "the empty grave." His policy was bribery and corruption. Satan "prompted his Allies, the Chief Priests, to give large money to the Roman soldiers who kept guard at the Saviour's tomb." It seems strange that a few silver dollars should be expected to frustrate the power of omnipotence and the knowledge of omniscience. The story is spoilt by a very bad pun in the editorial comment which says that because of this big money, the soldiers "gave currency" to a lie. Gave and received currency apparently!

The Pentecostal League finds Prayer profitable. It advertises that during the current week (appropriately but inaccurately described as "Commencing April 1):—

1. A suitable sum has been given to the family of a Christian man who became hopelessly insane.

It does not state whether the insanity or the money or both resulted from prayer.

2. Praise is offered for City premises let in wonderful answer to prayer.

In this case there is a joker in the pack—or a sad lack of faith. The note ends in the rather pointed remark:—

Prayer is asked that the new tenant may fulfil his responsibilities.

Praise is offered for answered prayer for a sister in financial difficulties.

Her again is a "Tag," suggesting that all is not quite as it should be:—

Guidance concerning a complete settlement is now sought.

Fifty Years Ago

At Exeter there is a wicked young vagabond, one William Denham, a telegraph messenger, who has the audacity to whistle in the streets even when the Rev. John Ingle is passing. He paid for his irreverence by receiving a smart blow on the mouth, causing it to bleed. In view of the immense provocation the magistrates let the clergyman off with a fine of 5s.

Prince Leopold is dead; so is Nicholas Trübner. One did nothing except display a little intelligence, which would have astonished nobody if he had not been a member of the most stupid family that ever held the English throne. The other was an enterprising publisher, who introduced to English readers some of the most eminent thinkers in Europe; opened up to them, through the agency of scholars and translators, much of the ancient wisdom of the East; and disseminated a large variety of liberal literature, which must have beneficially leavened the public mind and assisted the march of progress. The one has half the newspaper to himself for days; the other has here and there an obscure paragraph. Such is the surprising mental condition of the people who sing "Rule Britannia" and "God save the Queen."

The "Freethinker," April 6, 1884.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL

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

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ATHOS ZENO AND J. L. ORTON.—Held over till next week. Blame holidays.

J. T. BRIGHTON.—Sorry to learn you have been ill. We have not been exactly sick but a little indisposed. Will bear in mind your suggestion.

H. EYNITONE (Victoria).—Thanks for cuttings. Your Broadcasting programmes for Sundays appear to be modelled on our own—just as religious, and just as dull.

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

SPECIAL NOTICE

On and after March 31st, the offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, will be removed to:—

68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

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

We are indebted to an old South African friend of the *Freethinker*, Mr. F. W. R. Silke, for a brief report of a blasphemy case which occurred in Johannesburg. Unfortunately, the account given in the papers forwarded does not set out exactly what the charge of blasphemy was based on. A man named Clewin William Webb, editor of a paper called *Ringhals*, was charged on three counts, blasphemy, publishing indecent matter and criminal defamation. From a brief account in one paper, it would seem that Mr. Webb was writing concerning the treatment of girls and others in a religious home where labour was employed, and the only indication there is in the report of "blasphemy," is that he brought charges against a clergyman. These may have been defamatory, but if one can judge from the Magistrate's remarks, not so much would have been made of the matter if a man of God had not been concerned in it. The case is an illustration of the necessity of wiping out the priest-made crime of blasphemy wherever it exists. It is a survival from the Dark Ages—and beyond.

Of even greater significance as indicating the wave of reaction that is sweeping over the world is the attempt of the Cape Government to engineer a revival of the infamous Security Law, which was abolished in this country in 1859. This demanded a sum of £500, to be deposited by anyone starting a paper, against publishing anything of a blasphemous or treasonable character. Naturally a law of this kind affects small and unpopular papers most, and it is precisely this class at which the measure is aimed. We are glad to see that, thanks, we imagine largely to the activity of Mr. Silke—himself an advocate—that the proposal was finally rejected by a vote of 73 to 33.

A number of leading articles in the South African papers dwelt upon the retrogressive nature of the proposal, but it is clear that without the activity of a few earnest lovers of freedom the proposal might have been carried. There is nothing like letting daylight in on

such manouvers as this one. The only object of such legislation is to prevent full and free discussion, for it is precisely the class of paper to which a country owes most that the "security" would tell against. Papers that represent large vested interests, and those of the "respectable" order may safely be trusted never to publish much that would agitate people. In India, the Security law was revived some years ago, and, we believe is still law there. But reactionaries have in India a stronger hold than in South Africa.

Everyone knows that a gambling debt is not enforceable at law. It is left to the honour of the individual to liquidate his obligations. We also can recall the outcry from many sources, amongst these leading members of the Government, against the rascality of the Russians in not meeting the claims of Lena Goldfield shareholders. Well, in *The Civilian War Sufferer* (3s. 6d), we have an account of the manner in which the Government of this country, in this case publicly claiming as a trustee for certain interests has held back for its own uses about forty million pounds out of a total of £45,000,000.

This sum of £45,000,000 was claimed from the German people, and paid, in order to reimburse those civilians who had suffered from raids and other enemy action. The Government was, morally, thus in the position of a trustee. It claimed on behalf of certain people a huge sum of money. The money was paid. But having got the money the Government sheltered itself behind the plea that the money was claimed by the Crown, and anything paid to the subject was an act of grace and the subject had no legal claim. This may be good law; we can only say that it is as mean a theft, morally, as one can conceive. It is lower than the relations existing from the average backer of horses and his bookmaker, from whose wickedness the Government is introducing a Bill to protect the same subject. The *Solicitor's Journal* rightly said that "If a great territorial magnate or a powerful corporation or company collected money for a specific purpose, and then refused to account to humbler folk, any judge would make an order against him with a stinging rebuke on the elements of honesty." Every decent-minded man and woman will agree with this. The annexing of this £45,000,000 is one of the meanest things of which we have had for some time.

We have no doubt but that the kindly words of Mr. Justice Hawke addressed to the nineteen Fascists charged with conspiring to effect a public mischief, will prevent this gallant little pantomime army offending again in the same way. Having played at Fascistic death and glory boys, they immediately surrendered when ordered by the police to do so, saluted their leader, Sir Oswald Mosley, in open court, and then promised to be good little boys if they were forgiven by the Judge. It is true they had to pay the costs of the prosecution, but there is no lack of money behind either the German or the British branch of the Fascists. Mr. Justice Hawke was probably wise in not making martyrs of the gallant nineteen, and using them only as material for laughter. The boys have had their ancient schoolboy game of "Thieves and robbers," and there is, for the moment the end of it. But we do not know that other bodies who start playing the same game will get off so easily.

Mr. Justice Hawke said he realized that the daring nineteen were misled by others, and it was in their favour that when the police came they at once gave way. But this is quite in line with the ethics of Nazi heroism. Nazis do not attack burly policemen or bodies of equal numbers. "Beating-up" and castor oil are reserved for old men and boys, or those in captivity, or even for women. And when a cartload of British policemen came along the black-shirted heroes promptly went off as directed. Their chorus of promises never to do it again, when the question was put to them in the Court was quite common. We wonder whether Sir Oswald has enough sense of humour to smile at the representatives of the army of heroes he commands? There have been cases where those who have defied the law have gone to prison rather than promise to be good boys. Fascists are made of different material.

The Great Blasphemy Case

JUDGE ORDERS ARREST OF A WITNESS.

AMAZING scenes marked the conclusion of what has come to be known as "The Great Blasphemy Case." Silk hats, felt hats, shovel hats, stringed hats, "Robey" hats (not omitting a naval spectator's contribution of "tin hats"), birettas, cassocks, cloaks, hoods, aprons, gaiters and semi-military uniforms were prominent in the Court corridors; while the streets were thronged with "extras" (to adopt a film term) in various "Army" uniforms and other quaint attire. What appeared to be a revolt of workers turned out to be a demonstration by partisans carrying boards, banners, bills, etc., bearing meaningless slogans of various sects and societies.

Our space will only allow a bare fraction of the arguments in this lengthy case to be published.

It will be recalled that Lord Davidson seeks to restrain Unby Lever from uttering and publishing certain statements alleged to constitute a gross slander and libel upon him (plaintiff). In respect to Lord Davidson's reputed "supernatural" position, the action comes within the charge of Blasphemy. A claim for substantial damages is part of the suit by reason of the alleged loss of custom and profit plaintiff has suffered in his professions as prophet, teacher, faith-healer, miracle-worker, Messiah and Almighty—among other things. Defendant impugns the plaintiff's existence, or right to the titles and claims set forth, but waives the question of plaintiff being a natural son of one David. [Editor's note: Hence the name, DAVID'S SON.]

Mr. Tolland Tithe appears for plaintiff, defendant conducting his own case.

When Mr. Justice Reason took his scat to-day, the evidence of Mr. Cardinal Pope was taken. Mr. Pope stated that he was sole representative and agent throughout the world for plaintiff. [Murmurs in court.] His office had descended roughly for two-thousand years—

Judge: "Roughly, did you say? Have you the inquisition and restraints imposed by your organization in mind when you say 'roughly'?"

Witness replied that he used the word "roughly" in a figurative sense only. Continuing, he complained that he himself had been accused by defendant of speculating in "futures" with the funds of clients, especially of poor and ignorant clients, and also with obtaining vast sums of money and treasure by false pretences, fortune-telling and like deceits. But it was defendant's charge that his (witness's) principal did not exist and never had existed: or, alternatively, that if he had existed, he was the son of a woman in the natural sense, that prompted this prosecution.

Judge: "Is your contention that the plaintiff is, or was, an unnatural son, then?" [Laughter.]

Witness answered in the affirmative, to further laughter in court. Following several question by counsel, witness, under cross-examination by defendant, admitted that similar charges to those alleged against him (defendant) had been made many years ago by Col. Ingersoll, Charles Bradlaugh, and very many others. Proceedings had not been taken more frequently because (witness protested angrily) "such people seek to unveil mysteries." He (Mr. Pope) would not agree that threats to burn all opponents ought to rouse antipathy in sensible—and, more particularly, sensitive minds. Turning to the judge, witness said, "I have full authority to annul such threats, my lord, on payments according to scale, and (unctuously) if your lordship will forthwith declare for plaintiff, I offer you a free dispensation—"

Judge (sternly): "Stop!—Officer! take this person into custody; I will deal with him later. Your next witness, Mr. Tithe."

Mr. Cant Ebor then stepped into the box, and began, "As the sole representative and agent throughout the world of—" when the judge interposed with, "Wait a moment! Wait a moment! The last witness claimed to be so." Mr. Ebor explained that he (Mr. Ebor) was indeed the only true representative of the lord-plaintiff; Mr. Pope had been superseded—so far as the British Empire was concerned, at all events.

Mr. Tithe: "Your lordship will understand that on account of the immense and wide interests of the lord-plaintiff, we have to wink—if the expression may be pardoned—at many and sundry schisms in his business. Such divisions do not, however, affect the shares or holdings represented by Mr. Ebor."

Resuming, Mr. Ebor said his evidence would be mainly a repetition of Mr. Pope's—with certain trivial reservations. He (witness) was less concerned with the "maternity" of the lord-plaintiff than with the latter's "paternity."

Little more was elicited in Mr. Ebor's cross-examination, and Mr. Chapel Pugh entered the box. He made a particular grievance of defendant's equanimity and cheerfulness when faced with the solemn accusations of Nonconformity—the sect he (witness) respected. Defendant even denied the Lord's day!

General Bludd Andfire's testimony followed. Calling "Hallelujah" over his shoulder to several comely damsels in poke-bonnets, the General bounced into the witness-box rattling a box marked "Self-denial, Fire Insurance Headquarters, Queen Victoria Street, E.C.4." With a whoop of "Glory be!" he first enquired of the judge whether his lordship was "saved."

Judge: "Mr. Tithe, is this witness *safe*? This is not Bedlam, you know."

Mr. Tithe: "It is merely the custom of his tribe, my lord; I trust you may overlook the matter."

Judge: "Let the witness proceed."

The General, smiling and ogling the Court, testified that he had not the same ground of complaint as the previous witnesses, because the big drums of his "Army" could drown all opposition. Nevertheless, defendant's denial of "the lamb's" resources in blood and brimstone was "a wicked thing." He "hoped the 'Army' therefore, might secure a goodly proportion of whatever damages—"

Judge: "That will do; stand down—When do you propose to address the Court, Mr. Tithe?"

Mr. Tithe: "I have some thousands of witnesses, my lord—"

Judge: "What!!—M-m, this case appears to have had no beginning and, apparently, it has no end. Please limit any further "evidence," Mr. Tithe."

Counsel contented himself with several more witnesses, including Miss Eddie Baker (the Bakelites), Mr. Jeremiah (Holy Strollers), and Professor C. Rackers, O.K., F.R.S.B., etc. (Psychical Whirlists). Their irrelevance puzzled the judge himself, who finally called for Lord Davidson.

Mr. Tithe: "He is not here, my lord—except in spirit."

Judge: "Are you offering a coroner's court exhibit as your principal witness, Mr. Tithe?"

Mr. Tithe: "I mean a ghostly spirit, m'lord."

Judge: "Ghostly seems to me more apt."

Mr. Tithe: "He is the well-known god, m'lud, whose home is on high, beyond the clouds, in the sky. That is the reason he has agents, who pray to him for guidance in his affairs."

Judge: "And prey on others in *their* affairs, eh, Mr. Tithe? Um—my remark a short time back was

obviously an error: this is Bedlam. If the agent in England looks up for help, then the agent in Australia is looking the other way, surely.

"However, this astounding case can go no further. It is without precedent—and so shall my judgment be. You and your witnesses, Mr. Tithe, have brought the law into utmost contempt. Without the slightest cause in reason, logic, sense or justice, you cite defendant to answer a non-established plaint before a non-existing plaintiff. Not one of your witnesses has proved an offence against his (or her) so-called principal, on whose behalf he was supposed to give evidence. On the other hand, each witness has made personal to himself (or herself) the matters of alleged slander and libel upon someone else—one whom they do not, and cannot, produce. That person has been given fantastic titles and characteristics unrecognized in human society. Not one of his claims can be proved. It would be the greatest abuse of the Court, Mr. Tithe, even to allow another word from you or witnesses after such a display of—yes, I say, advisedly, imbecility. Such absurdities as we have heard are beyond all my experience on the bench, and I would cast my robe and wig into the Thames rather than administer a law under the demented conception of what is termed Blasphemy.

"Now to the defendant. It is unnecessary for him to defend himself against the plaintiff who does not materialize. He does not need my sympathy, but would rather, no doubt, extend his own with mine towards the deluded or vicious exponents of this lord-plaintiff's malpractices. Without mincing words, I have come to the conclusion that the leaders and officers of plaintiff—syndicates or sects—call them by what name you will—are nothing else but corporations of confidence-tricksters which have, as proved by the evidence, traded for some two-thousand years upon a credulous worship of the Intangible and the Unintelligible.

"I pronounce a verdict for defendant, and condemn all plaintiff witnesses in costs proportionate to each, his or her, properties and estates. The papers shall be impounded, and may eventually rest in the British Museum among the Codices and other perpetrations of cunning minds."

Mr. Tithe: "Will your lordship allow an appeal? Your judgment amounts to confiscation of my client's whole worldly wealth."

Judge: "You may make application elsewhere, Mr. Tithe. My judgment is final. You speak of your client's 'worldly wealth,' but I understood that his treasure is in heaven—wherever that may be. (Rising to leave the Court): The case is ended. And, Mr. Tithe, do not mistake the judgment—*not* 'Confiscation,' but RESTITUTION."

D.

Dickens, Shelley and Atheism

MIMNERMUS* elaborates his original statement, he does not add to his argument, nor make any attempt to meet my points in detail. Generalizations about Shelley's reputation as a blasphemer and Freethinker are not to the point. Thomas Paine's was similar, and he was a Theist. What the ruffian did and said at Pisa (an incident undated), as, significantly, are all Mimnermus's data, is not evidence. A hundred years ago, few people troubled about degrees of heresy. Atheism was a general term of obloquy applied to people whose religious views you disliked.

Perhaps it was too much to expect Mimnermus to consult my book on Dickens, for I am a writer of small importance, but I thought he might have taken the trouble to consult the late J. M. Robertson's *A History*

of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century. I will quote a few sentences:—"When the unauthorized reprint" (*Queen Mab* with the notes expanding *The Necessity of Atheism*) thus appeared (1821) he declared he had not seen the book for years, but that so far as he recollected it was 'villainous trash.' In the *Defence of Poetry*, he repudiates by implication the Atheism of 'some of the French writers,' and in the essay *On Life*, he recants the 'materialism' of his youth. Seeing that in the same essay he maintained to the last his conviction that mind could not create matter (which was the essence of materialism for his day) and had from the first stood for a 'Spirit of the Universe,' as against the Deity of the popular creed, his position was thus ambiguous". . . In the *Essay on Christianity*, he writes "There is a power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords, at will"; and this doctrine of Deity he assumes to be in accordance with that of Jesus, refusing to believe that his benevolent hero can have taught the doctrine of future punishment or believed in an anthropomorphic God. . . The religionist can thus claim that in his last years Shelley had revoked his *Necessity of Atheism*, and might accordingly be on the way to an acceptance of Christ as a pattern Personality and a great moral teacher." Here, too, is Mr. Joseph McCabe. "The 'Atheistic Materialism' which he had in earlier years borrowed from the French Encyclopedists had yielded place to a spiritual philosophy and mild form of Theism. 'Adonais' expresses his latest views." Mr. H. S. Salt refers to his later pantheism, and adds, "in his maturer years he made more frequent reference to the great World-Spirit, in whom he had from the first believed."

The passage from Trelawny is as follows:—

"'Why,' I asked, 'do you call yourself an Atheist? it annihilates you in this world.

"'It is a word of abuse to stop discussion, a painted devil to frighten the foolish, a threat to intimidate the wise and good. I used it to express my abhorrence of superstition; I took up the word, as a knight took up a gauntlet, in defiance of injustice.'"

Truly, as Mimnermus says, "a gage of battle." Why did not Shelley then say he called himself so because he was then, and was still, correctly so described? This brings Mimnermus to answer himself. It was youth's rebel flag. In a similar mood, whilst a church-member and with a Methodist parson at my father's dinner table, I announced myself as a Freethinker. I remained in the bosom of the Church for years after.

Will then Mimnermus, out of his superior knowledge of Shelley

(1) Show us where Messrs Robertson, McCabe, and Salt were wrong.

(2) How the essays are to be interpreted.

(3) How we can Atheistically expound the following lines from *Adonais* (written in the last year of Shelley's life):—

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heavens's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

Of Dickens, I will say I did not pretend he was a "hard-boiled Church-man and Trinitarian." As to my acquaintanceship with him, I think I have read all his published work, and much not intended for publication. I have over 50 books on Dickens, and have read almost all of them. I was secretary of a Branch of the Dickens' Fellowship for over four years, I have been a contributor to the "Dickensian," and my book on *Dickens and Religion* was warmly praised by the late Mr. J. M. Robertson and your reviewer, amongst others. But I know I can still learn more, so will Mimnermus, on the second time of asking, say what is his authority for the statement that Dickens gave time and money to the National Sunday League (sympathy is not denied)? Will he also give some quotations to show that Dickens had any interest in doctrinal Unitarianism? (I know only one passage—and that in a letter—which suggests he had any knowledge of Biblical criticism; and of Darwin and evolution he was utterly oblivious). Will he also

* *Freethinker*, March 18.

indicate those passages in the now completed *Life of Our Lord*, which was so heretical as to delay publication?

I am quite willing to give Shelley the label that fits myself, and to find Dickens nearer my position than I think he was, but I cannot court the suggestion that monkeying with facts is only reprehensible when it is in defence of orthodoxy.

W. KENT.

To Hell with your Wars

"War will one day be looked back upon as a horrible piece of barbarism belonging to long-past dark ages."

P. Deussen.

If one desires confirmation of the germ of truth contained in that very cynical epigram, "History teaches us that we do not learn from history," one need only study the events of the last thirty years. In pre-1914 days it was popularly believed that to avoid war the nations should prepare for war, the assumption being that a nation well equipped with soldiers, guns, battle-ships and the usual gamut of murder organization would never be attacked by others. It was, of course, taken for granted in the most credulous fashion that one's own nation would never attack another, the arms were merely for defensive purposes.

The transparent fallacy in this line of argument was exposed mercilessly by more than one writer, but the nations of the world armed, and their watchword was "preparedness." What exactly they were prepared for apparently nobody knew, or at least the general public was never told. And finally in 1914 the powder magazine blew up. Millions of men, who had blindly allowed their leaders to engulf their countries in a holocaust of carnage, found themselves flocking into recruiting stations believing it to be their duty to fight. Even after the lapse of many years it wrings one's heart to think of how these millions of decent, honest citizens were lured to bestial conditions and hideous deaths by such "clotted nonsense" as "The war to end war," "Make the world safe for democracy," "A just war," whereas in truth they were being entrapped into just another war, similar to all wars preceding it.

For four years civilians in uniform dragged out a dreary existence in the bloodiest orgy of murder ever conceived. When the "cease fire" sounded, war-weary men were too eager to return to their homes and normal occupations to care about anything else. Still trusting their knavish leaders, they expected to enjoy the wonderful things they had fought for and had been promised, but it was not to be. The inevitable results of war stared them in the face, and the sight was far from pleasant—widespread unemployment and acute economic distress, with all the old national hatreds as active as ever. As for democracy, the war, far from having made the world safe for it, had so undermined adherence to democratic principles that it commanded far less support than at any time during the previous thirty years. It completely disappeared in Russia, Italy and Germany (and incidentally is in grave danger of being jettisoned in nearly every European state).

But the worst was still to come. Despite the fact that experience had given the lie direct to all the pre-war theories that war could be avoided by preparing for it, the nations were once more engaged in a maniacal armament race, the only difference being in the type of armaments required. That race is on now, and the only inference possible is that we are heading for another war, and incidentally on a more colossal scale than ever. It is apparently being taken for granted that there will be the usual millions of men ready to join the forces when war is declared, content again to risk their lives in degrading conditions in the sacred name of patriotism.

And yet the fact seems to me to be that men, with no wish to fight, but bewildered by their fancied inability to do anything else, trust blindly to governments, hoping that they will be led in the paths of peace. That the trust will be betrayed seems almost inevitable. It is tragic, for the remedy lies close to hand and is relatively simple. It lies in the fact that no government can take

its nation into war if the people, in sufficiently large numbers, refuse to fight. That is the remedy—an uncompromising refusal to bear arms. That attitude, if openly expressed everywhere in the attempt to make converts, can do much good at the present time, because now is the time to create that body of opposition to war which will smash any government that tries to override it.

If men, in their thousands, will voice that sentiment now and let parliaments, war-mongers and all the rest of the class that "glories" in war (and fattens on war profits) know that they are solidly opposed to fighting, then the danger of war being declared will be considerably lessened.

But it is an attitude that must be rigidly adhered to if and when war is declared. It is valueless for men to oppose war in peace-time and then become "jingoists" when war breaks out. That is precisely what the war-makers want. It is of course a matter that each man must face up to squarely and decide for himself. Each man should be prepared to ignore the rest of the nation, stand boldly on his own two feet, and say definitely, in both peace-time and war, "I will not fight in your wars." All who take this stand must be prepared to meet whatever penalty a war-mad government may choose to inflict. It may obviously mean death, but what of it? Death is infinitely to be preferred to participation in the hell we endured from 1914 to 1918.

Many arguments have been advanced to meet opposition to war, but there is practically nothing one can say to the man who will not bear arms and offers no reason beyond a fixed determination not to be involved. This was undoubtedly the real attitude of many of the conscientious objectors in the last war, but they sheltered behind legal clauses and were often in positions that skillful tribunal judges could have shattered. Without wishing to minimize the good work they did, I suggest that it is better to oppose war unconditionally than to find excuses, good or bad, for being allowed to escape military service. If war is to be killed, it is not excuses for keeping out of the fray that are required, but an unambiguous declaration that nothing shall drag one into it. Finding excuses and reasons for not fighting seems to imply to some extent agreement with war, when actually one should say "Let those fight who believe in war. I do not believe in it, and will not join in it anyway."

Once the individual accepts this stand, all the time-worn arguments are seen to be threadbare. He ceases to be interested in hisalutin' nonsense about "just" wars, cares not whether "his country" is being invaded or is invading another, and sees little or no difference between offensive and defensive. To him any war is just a war, and he will have nothing to do with it. He can even laugh at the idea that there is one coming conflict in which he must engage—the revolution evolving from class war: to him it is again just another war that he is quite determined shall not trap him.

I think that this attitude, which will undoubtedly demand courage if war comes again, is nevertheless invincible, because it goes to the root of the matter. It makes no song about objecting to taking life (few of us would refuse to kill in certain circumstances), it leaves out of the question footling and irrelevant ethical abstractions (war is itself quite unethical anyway); it suggests that men should not be afraid to set themselves against the law, when the need arises. This has been done in other departments of social life by innumerable predecessors in the fight for freedom and new ideas (one need only instance the opposition to the press laws, to religious intolerance, to corn laws, and the fight for male and later female suffrage—the list is endless).

It will be noticed that there has been no appeal to the multitudinous arguments concerning the futility of war, its beastliness, its utter failure to settle disputes satisfactorily, its hideous pain and anxiety, its unspeakable degradation, its colossal cost. These are not necessary, they can be brought in when the opposition to war is widespread, and nations are seeking reasons for abandoning for all time such a barbaric practice. At present it is enough to take the immovable stand—"To hell with your wars! I will not bear arms for you."

C. J. READ-HARRISON.

More Misfits

SINCE the article on this topic appeared in the *Freethinker* of February 25, more information about the personnel, organization and procedure at the B.B.C. has come to hand.

From articles in the Press, including an interview with Oliver Baldwin, the B.B.C. film critic, we have learned that an Admiral and a Colonel form, in conjunction with Sir John Reith, the "Big Three" of Broadcasting House. Turning as before to *Who's Who* in the quest for some indication of the qualification of these "gentlemen of the fighting services," we find the name of the Admiral; but there is nothing to show that his knowledge and experience extend beyond naval affairs. The Colonel's name, however, could not be found; and it was necessary to form some sort of conclusion as to his fitness or otherwise for his post from two references made by those who evidently know him, personally or by repute. Of these references we may take those of Baldwin and an eminent journalist. These are respectively: "I am perfectly certain that the last person to know how or why he got his job was Colonel Downay"; "No one could have been more surprised than Colonel Downay at his appointment." And Baldwin added, more comprehensively and devastatingly, "I have nothing but contempt for the headquarters department."

The *Daily Herald*, in an article on "B.B.C. Staff Revolt," a few days ago described a condition of affairs at Broadcasting House, that under the circumstances may be regarded as natural and more or less inevitable. It was stated that there is a "quarter-deck and barrack-square régime," with "niggling red-tape regulations"; that "aye, aye, sir," and "thank you for leave to speak," describe the atmosphere; that the staff are expected to "stand to attention when any of the 'big three' appear"; and that "a man or woman may be sacked without any reason being given, and without even the right to demand a reason"; and so on.

With reference to this "Prussianism," the newspaper mentioned, rather significantly remarks that as far back as July, 1932, when the King and Queen visited the B.B.C., the "drilling" began to be more intensive; that playwrights, musicians and actors were ordered to come to the studio at certain times to rehearse the performance of the National Anthem; and that written instructions on points of etiquette and behaviour were circulated. It was added that rules and instructions "have reached their irritating limit since Colonel Downay of the Coldstream Guards was surprisingly appointed as Controller of Programmes, to join forces with Sir Charles Carpendale, who is Controller of Administration."

Here, then we have the virtual dictatorship of a great institution—one which specially demands for its management comprehensive outlook—by an engineer, a soldier and a sailor. However it may be with the art and entertainment department, it would be a miracle if the more cultural side were satisfactorily conducted.

Among other things, we are told that the censorship has become intolerable; that the submitted text of a talk has not only been subjected to cuts, but rewritten (whether by the engineer, sailor or soldier does not appear), and that bits in no wise suggested by the original manuscript were put in.

The control of this mighty monopoly by the persons cited—who cannot be expected to hold views other than the older, more conventional and undemocratic ones—obviously forms a serious bar to rational progress, and in certain circumstances may become a public danger. Is the next democratic Government to be at the mercy of censorship and (as we may anticipate) of constant, if more or less veiled, antagonistic propaganda by two or three reactionaries?

As regards religious affairs the obtrusion of pietism into talks on other subjects continues. The last fatuous instance was the declaration of Quintin Hogg (described as one of the more intelligent of the younger Conservatives) that he "would stake the future of the country on the truth of Christianity."

Since writing the above there have been further developments. Sir John Reith has addressed Members of

Parliament at a private meeting of Government supporters, and is "mobilising vast and influential forces to defeat any attempts to give Parliament increased authority over the B.B.C."; that opposition members resent this, and are demanding investigation of the methods of Broadcasting House as regards censorship "of views and opinions distasteful to highly-placed B.B.C. officials," the nature of the Sunday programmes, the military-naval discipline, the fitness of some of the most prominent officials for some of their duties, as well as the financial basis of the institution. This is good news; and it will be interesting to see the outcome.

J. REEVES.

Correspondence

ON DICTATORSHIPS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The way in which you deal with dictatorships, in the Editorial note to my letter in the *Freethinker* of April 1, reveals the fact that British Freethought, as represented by yourself, is more concerned with words than with facts, as far as social reconstruction is concerned.

It is news to me that the *character* of a dictatorship is not affected by the end at which it is aiming.

Is a democracy in which concealed power and influence are exerted in the interest of a section of the community the same as a democracy in which every effort is made to run society for the benefit of all concerned? The same question may be asked with regard to a republic, a monarchy, an oligarchy, and even with regard to a Freethought Society. Is a Society of religious Freethinkers, who allow each other freedom of thought within the bounds of religion, the same in *character* as a society of Atheistic Freethinkers?

Then, I am told a dictatorship is a dictatorship, whether in the interest of Socialism or Capitalism. So is a democracy still a democracy whether it is full of legal, political, and social humbug, or without all these. So may a Freethought Society still be a Freethought Society whether the membership be made up of fools or philosophers.

Of course I can publicly attack Capitalism, provided what I say is not likely to cause men to take immediate action towards destroying Capitalistic society. Who worries about freedom of thought, in the political sphere, if it is not likely to become expressed in action? Capitalism requires a fair measure of freedom of thought for its own development, so it is allowed; but those in power take precautions against such freedom being carried too far. Hence the history of Capitalism with its frequent periods of repression and reaction. Otherwise there would have been the chance of a Freethought development that would have ended in the transformation of society into one with, as far as possible, complete economic and intellectual freedom for all.

No such development has been, is, or will be possible under Capitalism. Liberty to attack the system is restricted whether I can legally be accused of treason or not.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

[I am afraid there is little use continuing this discussion as Mr. Stafford and myself appear to be using a different vocabulary. All I can do is to explain and contrast, and leave it at that. By a dictatorship I mean the exercise of uncontrollable power, and in social or political matters the exercise of power without any form of control by those over whom the power is exercised.

Consequently I cannot see any difference, *per se*, between dictatorships. Whether the dictatorship is exercised for or against "economic freedom" does not, in my judgment, alter its character as a dictatorship. Mr. Stafford seems to think otherwise. Personally, I object to a dictatorship, whether it is exercised on behalf of capitalism or against it.

Capitalism in power seems to me to act like most other established powers, it strives for its own perpetuation, and to suppress so far as it can those forces and movements that

make for its removal. Hence the importance of maintaining freedom of thought and publication against any and every established institution, Socialistic, Communistic, or Capitalistic. And, of course, every established institution pleads that it exists for the benefit of the people, or for society as a whole. It is one of those phrases that mean absolutely nothing in themselves. The character of dictatorship, strange as it appears to Mr. Stafford, is not changed by its aim.

Political thought does find some degree of expression in action, in this as in other countries. It leads to modifications of existing institutions, and the utmost efforts of capitalism cannot prevent these expressions finding realization in actions that are distinctly Socialistic in tendency.

Again Mr. Stafford seems to think that unless political thought can find *complete realization* in action it is not free. I hope that my own political thinking is not so unscientific as not to realize that there is always a point at which any conceivable social state will say that, while liberty of speech and thought may be permitted, it is not consonant with the well-being of the whole that every individual or every group of individuals shall be permitted to carry its political thought into action without regard to the opinions or desires of others. That kind of thing exists in no society of which I have ever heard. It would mean chaos, not order. The proper demand is for freedom of thought and discussion, which give an opportunity for all to persuade others, and so get thought realized in action. It is only by the absence of a dictatorship that this can be done.

I am very strongly opposed to all forms of slavery, mental or social, open or disguised. Most of all I am opposed to phrase slavery, which has the fatal quality of making a slave believe that his chains have no existence.

I trust that from the foregoing Mr. Stafford will at least understand my point of view.—C.C.]

SIR,—Much as I respect you, I cannot help agreeing with Mr. Egerton Stafford's letter in last week's *Freethinker*.

It seems to me that it is the *Character* of the Dictatorship which is the point at issue, and is not your remark on that point a bit "cryptic?" Surely if the "end" accomplished is good the dictatorship is justified.

You say that it is "the desirability of Dictatorship in any form which is in dispute," but surely, neither you, nor I have ever lived in any country where dictatorship in some form or other does not exist. Liberal-minded as you undoubtedly are, even You are a "dictator," when it has to be decided what articles are to be admitted in the *Freethinker*.

D. DAWSON.

[But we hope that we never suppress an opinion merely because we disagree with it.—ED.]

NO AWE, NO FAITH!

SIR,—Your correspondent, Mr. C. S. Fraser, says I placed my blind eye to the telescope or microscope. How then could I get any evidence for a God? I should see *nothing*! But I saw minute Bacteria in a row, as if friends were talking together, in their own way. Bacteria of *diseases* are quite secondary in the world, and emerge largely by men refusing to use fresh air and sunshine. Bacteria, by millions, are in the damp soil, and change the nitrites (from dead leaves) to nitrates; by which plants get new food, and so live!

Such a marvel happens daily in millions of cases *unknown* to the owners of such cells! Surely such events give us pause,—for awe! How could one become two? Why should Bacteria (in soil) *change* nitrites to nitrates? Are they chemists?

I do not say a God acted in each case *separately*, but that a Will to evolve plants, animals, men—with plants as fitting food for men; and animals as supplying a body to men—is of a marvellous process: and bids us *pause*! All of us are utterly dependent on One Infinite Life-giving-life!

Of that process the plants know nothing: nor did *men*, till the microscope revealed it. Without that process, plants would all die; and we should have *no food*; and die also. Animals live on plants largely—and our teeth show we were meant so to do; and not on meat.

Now, how *came* one—called Bacteria and Diatoms in the sea; and by their millions? Did Mr. C. S. Fraser make them? Did he *so* feed them that one became *two*!

That fact is of deep wonder. Each cell has a nucleus: and in it chromosomes, which divide *longitudinally*, and carry varied powers to a new generation!

The retina behind the eye gives us sight of all colours of the rainbow, and is most complex; and has six layers of cells! Yet it is as thin as this paper, and the cells lie from the front side of the retina, to the back side! In a flash we see pictures, or read words.

Evolution has moved up from light-rays to 92 grades of energy, as H.O., N.C., and their compounds; and the most intricate *carton compounds*, and so to move intricate cells, plants (lovely at times), animals, men, and men of wondrous powers! Who did it all? What Artist-Lover gave us life? If we stand in awe, we shall feel FAITH.

GILBERT T. SADLER.

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.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.40, Mr. Paul Goldman.

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, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. 3.30, Platform No. 1, Messrs. Bryant and Collins. Platform No. 2, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. 6.30, Messrs. Wood, Hyatt and others. Wednesday, 7.30, Mr. W. P. Campbell Everden.

INDOOR.

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Reggiori's Restaurant, 1 Euston Road, opposite King's Cross Station): 7.30, Sunday, April 8, Mr. W. A. Greatwood—"The Fraud of Feminism."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Sunday, April 8, John A. Hobson, M.A.—"Democracy and Internationalism."

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): 8.0, Monday, April 9, Mr. Paul Goldman—"Marriage and Morals."

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (The Market): 7.0, Messrs. F. Maughan and F. Fagan (Bolton) the two Ex R.C.'s—"The Great Lying Church."

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Level) 3.30, Mr. J. T. Byrne—"What are Christians Worshipping?" Please rally round this Summer.

INDOOR.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Sunday, April 8, Mr. Jack Clayton—"Man and His Ideas."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Board Room, Transport Buildings, Islington, Liverpool): 6.30, Annual General Meeting of members only.

NORTH SHIELDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Labour Social Hall): 7.0, Mr. Allan Flanders—"Fascism and Religion."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Rooms, Green Street): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton—A Lecture.

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