

# THE FREETHINKER

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**Views and Opinions**

**War and the Churches**

DR. F. W. NORWOOD, who is the preacher at the City Temple, and is also President of the Free Church Council, has been getting into the news. This is not a very difficult thing for a clergyman nowadays. He can do it by denouncing science and championing a very primitive form of religious belief, or he can do it by loudly confessing that he does not believe in some of the very childish stories that go to make up the mythology of Christianity. Dr. Norwood has gained prominence in some of the newspapers because of his denunciation of war as anti-Christian. That has been done often enough before, and for many centuries, but its influence in diminishing wars, or in making them, less brutal is not very observable. On the contrary, the fact is that the most brutal war for many centuries was recently fought between nations that were avowedly Christian. Nay, even now, it is not the brutality and the brutalizing consequences of war that have aroused among leading Christians a certain feeling against war; what has been made the basis of protest is that war has now become very destructive of life, it has become very costly, and civilians will, in future wars be as open to attack as soldiers.

But the number of people killed in war has nothing to do with the essential question. There was nothing great about the last war, it was simply a large war. But the death of a mouse is not different from the death of an elephant. A thousand families mourning the death of one of its members does not increase the volume of sorrow; it merely increases the number of those who grieve. Sorrow must be individual, and increasing the number of people who sorrow adds nothing to its volume. Nor do I see anything to regret in the fact that civilians will now be brought within the fighting area. It is only hypocrisy or stupidity that has prevented people realizing that war is always aimed at the aged, the helpless, and at children. To starve a people into submission is not worse than throwing bombs at them. The former is only a more

hypocritical method of destruction. As to the cost of war; that would only impress a people brought up under the influence of a religion that has always denied the value of doing anything serviceable unless one was paid back in another life. Of course, if we could have gone on having a number of nice little wars, each costing a few hundred thousand or so, and if the wars had been fought a long way from home, and if those killed had been but a few of our own people, and a large number of Africans, or Indians, or other coloured people, we should not have found the serenity of the preachers of this country seriously disturbed.

**Are the Clergy in Earnest?**

Dr. Norwood publicly dons the white sheet of repentance for the part played by himself and his ministerial brethren during the European War. But he pleads that they were speaking in all sincerity, even though they were mistaken. But the charge against the Christian clergy is not that they strutted proudly in military parades, wearing military uniforms, assuming the rank and drawing the pay of a military officer, while gaining for themselves exemption from military service. The charge against them is that at a time when anyone who laid legitimate claim to be teachers of the people should have tried to keep men's heads clear, when they should have impressed upon a people driven off their balance by artificially created hatred of the "enemy," when wise men would have tried to pave the way for a reasonable peace once the war had ended, at such a time the clergy allied themselves with paid journalists and propagandists who were ready to write as they were bid, and thus helped to create a condition of the public mind that made a genuine peace impossible. As much as any, and more than most, the clergy contributed to the state of Europe that has followed the war, and turned the peace into a mere armistice.

Dr. Norwood says that Christianity cannot exist in a country that believes in war. This is pure eye-wash. Unless the future is going to be very unlike the past, it is certain that when war comes again the clergy will discover that the war is again "God's war," that "our" cause is a righteous one, and we shall again be fighting in defence of Christian civilization. If the Christian clergy are in earnest they can easily prove their sincerity. Let them keep themselves free from all military displays in times of peace. Let them advise the Government that they will no longer serve as chaplains in the army or navy, that they will have nothing to do with military parades or the blessings of cannon and battleships. There will be no need for them to take sides for or against any particular war; they need only remember that however "inevitable" or "justifiable" a war may be it is the duty of the clergy to keep constantly before the minds of people those considerations that are higher

than the maintenance of empire or the vindication of what passes for "national honour." In this way they will not be moralizing war, and they will be helping to the creation of a permanent peace.

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#### Church and State

Dr. Norwood says that the question of the moment is the relation of the Church and State, and hints that the Church must be free from State control; otherwise it means either the "suppression or emasculation" of the Church. Again, mere words. Every Church has tried to get free from State control, but it has always aimed at getting State support and to exert control over the State. I know of nothing that Dr. Norwood has ever said which would indicate that he has anything else in view than this. For example, Dr. Norwood's own Church receives from the State an annual subsidy, the value of which is determined by the rates and taxes he would pay for a similar building not devoted to religion. His religion also receives protection from the State with regard to criticisms of religion, and with regard to Sunday observances, such as is not given to any opinion other than religion. There are other forms of State and municipal privileges which the clergy, Established and Nonconformist, enjoy in this country; but I have never found Dr. Norwood protesting against this favouritism shown by the State. He only objects to the State interfering with his religion. He is all take and no give. Finally, when the Jubilee celebrations are in full swing we shall find the clergy of all denominations falling over each other to receive official recognition as representative of sectarian organizations. It is absurd for a man to receive all this from the State, and then say he does not believe in the State interfering with religion. All he means is that he does not believe in any Church getting a larger share of State help than his, but he will join in a united effort for all of them to get more than they are getting at present.

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#### Christianity and Life

We should quite expect to find Dr. Norwood if he had been addressing an evangelistic gathering, to say that all attempts to weaken the power of Christianity had failed. But on this occasion he adopted another line, and said that "The Christian Church had never less influence than to-day in shaping politics." What ever of truth there is in this comes from the gradual secularizing of political life, and the general decay of religious belief. But it must also be borne in mind during the time covered by the decline of the power of Christianity, the health service of the country, the educational facilities provided, the general care of the poor, have advanced enormously. This is only another way of saying that the sense of social responsibility towards the poor and the sick, and for the education of the people has advanced enormously, side by side, with a decrease in the influence of the Christian religion. It is good to have this so plainly admitted by a prominent Christian preacher.

As a matter of fact, the great obstacle to the development of a higher social sense than now exists must be at least partly attributed to the influence of Christianity. For we are actually dealing with peoples, both here and abroad, in whose lives Christianity has been a very powerful influence for many centuries. The nations that are showing the world that not one of them can rely upon the honour or honesty of the others, are Christian countries. The Christian Churches have been the most divisive influence that the world has known, and has prevented the growth of a healthy social consciousness more than most people imagine. Even in the course of the last war, when men were ready to sink differences of edu-

cation, social standing and political opinion, the one thing they could not forget was their religious differences. Men in the trenches could eat together, live together, fight a common foe together, and when necessary, die together. The one thing they would not do was to pray together. When religion appeared upon the scene, Jew, Christian and Mohammedan, Roman Catholic and Protestant separated themselves from their fellows and pursued their religious oaths alone.

I can further illustrate my meaning by a passage from the *Church Times* for January 12. Commenting upon Dr. Norwood's remark, the *Church Times* says that this small influence of Christianity is a fact, and it will remain until men return to the undivided allegiance of earlier times. By that the *Church Times* means until we have one church to which all men belong. So while Dr. Norwood wants the State to give financial and legislative aid to all Christian sects the *Church Times* wants to see one Church only, and heretical doctrines to be permitted only so long as it is impossible to prevent heresy existing. If this means anything at all, it means that all men are to be united, not in the search for truth, and in the constant revision of accepted truths in the light of more recent knowledge—for so long as this is the case unity of opinion is impossible and undesirable—but there is to be a universal expression of the same views by all men. We must cease to be deliberative, independent individuals, and become mere echoes of established opinion.

And this lies at the root of much of the trouble from which the world is to-day suffering. It is the aim of all autocracies, whether individual or collective. The curse of many countries to-day—even extending to party organization and rule—is that we have extended this typically religious attitude of mind to politics and sociology. This has been done in two directions. First the type of mind which dared not question God, is utilized in creating a corresponding feeling towards another pseudo-entity, the State. Second, the greatest disservice Christianity did the Western world was the creation of a belief in the sanctity of established institutions. If this frame of mind had been restricted to religion it would have weakened as religious belief weakened. But in the process of the secularizing of the State the religious frame of mind was transferred to the social field. Intolerance became socialized and naturalized. The religious aim of getting all people to repeat the same formulas, to believe the same things, and to say the same things was transferred to the fields of politics and sociology. The spectacle of men such as Dr. Norwood, or of papers such as the *Church Times*, claiming to lay down laws that shall regulate social growth is bad enough, but when we have the same type of mind operating in the name of the Secular State, I am inclined to think that we are fronting a much more serious state of affairs. After all the true Freethinker is not engaged merely in destroying religious doctrines. He should be even more eager to destroy the type of mind that religion has fostered.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Romans showed a spirit of toleration to the religious opinions of other nations because they found nothing in these which aimed at the subversion of their own religion. The religion of the Romans was inseparably interwoven with their system of government. The Christians, by exposing the absurdities of their system of worship, in effect undermined the fabric of their political constitution; and hence they were not without reason considered by the Romans as a dangerous body of men. Hence those opprobrious epithets with which they have been stigmatized by Roman writers.—Tyler

## The Poetry of Science

"Poetry is the form most apt to preserve whatever the writer confides to it."—*Sully Prudhomme*.

"Song is not truth, not wisdom, but the rose  
Upon truth's lips, the light in wisdom's eyes."

*Watson.*

The name of Sully Prudhomme does not often meet the eye in these strenuous and exacting times, but a North-Country newspaper report stated that a lady had been granted a Fellowship at Durham University, and that her thesis was on that very notable French poet.

Prudhomme deserves recognition, for his literary significance lies in the fact that he caught a glimpse of the new poetry which science has revealed, and which is grander than that which it will destroy ultimately. People constantly assert that this is a scientific age, and that good poetry is impossible in such an atmosphere. The poets themselves help this delusion by seeking their subjects from the past. Instead of drawing inspiration from the world around them they find subjects in the Greek and Roman classics, and in other outworn subjects. Yet Sully Prudhomme was awarded the Nobel prize for the then greatest work in pure literature. To those who admire the sham antique school of poetry it must be a shock that a prize for the ideal in literature was awarded to a man who, more than any other modern poet, has embodied in his verse the new material gathered by science, and has best expressed the sceptical spirit which characterizes the age.

Sully Prudhomme's imagination and his modes of thought were scientific. He foreshadowed the "Bobby Burns to sing the song of steam," whom Rudyard Kipling called for. He was not a poet of the people like Béranger, or a writer of music-hall songs. But he differed from the vast majority of literary men in that he caught a glimpse of the new poetry which science has revealed. He did not hold to the theory that the vocabulary of three centuries ago was better fitted to express modern thought and feeling than the living language of our own times.

A poet who sang of balloons and barometers, of submarine cables and photography, of evolution and specific gravity determinations, was a novelty to the critics. According to the vulgar standard the sword is more poetical than the gun. Cavalry may be mentioned, but to introduce torpedo-boats into poetry is to attempt too much. That Sully Prudhomme should have utilized astronomy was taken for granted, but that he should have sung of biology and chemistry was unpardonable. In England the difference between the literary and popular vocabularies is greater than in France, and there is all the more need of poets bold enough to bridge the gulf which separates literature from life. The success of Prudhomme should stimulate our poets to develop the deeper meaning and hidden beauty of life.

This is not by any means an entirely new note in literature. Twenty centuries ago Lucretius, in his *De Rerum Natura*, thrilled his readers with his magnificent presentation of the atomic theory and other scientific ideas. His very method is but part of the modern method, it is the modern method in its infancy. We may gain some notion of the general effect of Lucretius's masterpiece if we conceive Tennyson to have devoted his genius to versifying Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*, or Swinburne to have substituted his command of language to the poetic presentation of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. But Lucretius had no immediate successors. His presentation of the hidden truths of nature hardly found any further

poetic expression until the advent of the nineteenth century.

Among the qualities which science imposes in poetry are clarity and sincerity, and both these are prominent in Prudhomme's poems. Indeed, Brunetière, a reactionary, complained that he was "too conscientious," and was too much afraid of the Sorbonne and the École Polytechnique, and did not care enough for his readers. Brunetière missed the freedom of phrases when poets were more musical than truthful, and cared little what they said so long as they said it beautifully. Granting that over nicety is a blemish, is it not possible that poetry can acquire that exactness demanded by science without losing its charm? Prudhomme proved that it can. Tennyson, too, in our own language, has also shown the same thing. Passages from *In Memoriam*, and *The Two Voices*, as well as from *Le Bonheur*, and *La Justice*, express scientific theories or metaphysical arguments as accurately as any technical treatise, and prove beyond all cavil and dispute that it is not necessary to be false in order to be poetical.

It was once thought that the advance of science would make poetry impossible. We now know that this is not the case. There is as much poetry to be seen through the microscope and the telescope as with the naked eye. Sully Prudhomme had a truer insight into the significance of the effect of science on poetry than Keats, consummate artist as he was. Like Walt Whitman, Prudhomme did not find it necessary to use the old scenery and the old worm-eaten clothes in the literary property-room. What beauty and force the metaphors of science may give to literature has been shown abundantly by Ruskin and Tennyson in English prose and poetry, Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee*, and many another work, are examples of what may be achieved by those who can handle the new symbolism. It requires a master-hand to use the crude material excavated by science, because it is lacking in poetical association in the public mind. There is always the danger of embodying unassimilable matter. The average poet masks sheer incapacity by using words and thoughts which he knows are poetical because other poets have used them for many centuries.

Prudhomme extended the domain of poetry. Maybe he occasionally passed over the boundary of poetry into prose in his use of unconventional expression. The boundary-line depends largely on the reader. Oliver Wendell Holmes succeeded in *The Chambered Nautilus*, and failed in *The Living Temple*, although it would be hard to say why the anatomy of a mollusc should be more susceptible of poetic employ than that of man. Our own George Meredith's rare genius was capable of uniting both the old and new methods. In his magnificent sonnet; *Lucifer in Starlight*, he added a masterpiece to English poetry, and pointed the way to the younger poets.

What seems foreign in Prudhomme's poetry is his frequent note of sadness, "the sense of tears in mortal things," sinking at times to a mild meliorism. Not but what he is cheerful compared with many Continental writers, who, though often joyful in actual life, are not often cheerful in literature. Prudhomme's sadness never takes the personal and theatrical form of Byron or Baudelaire, but is clear and cold. In the last resort, like Voltaire, he bids us "cultivate our garden."

Sully Prudhomme, as becomes a pioneer, was a Freethinker. Death is to him, as to Walt Whitman, the liberator as well as the consoler, and on this subject he has written with the force and originality of a master. Here is a translation which preserves something of the charm of the great original. It is entitled *The Hour of Death*, and was put into English

by George Du Maurier, the genial *Punch* artist, and the author of *Trilby*, who was himself a Freethinker and a genius :—

"Kindly watchers by my bed, lift no voice in prayer,  
Waste not any words on me when the hour is nigh;  
Let a stream of melody but flow from some sweet player,  
And meekly will I lay my head and fold my hands to die.  
Sick am I of idle words, past all reconciling—  
Words that weary and perplex, and pander and conceal;  
Wake the sounds that cannot lie, for all their sweet be-  
guiling,  
The language one need fathom not, but only hear and feel;  
Let them roll once more to me, and ripple in my hearing,  
Like waves upon a lonely beach, where no craft anchoreth,  
That I may steep myself therein, and craving nought, nor  
fearing,  
Drift on through slumber to a dream, and through a dream  
to death."

MIMNERMUS.

## Guy de Maupassant on War

Most people, with any taste of literature, have read the principal works, at least, of Guy de Maupassant, one of the world's greatest short story writers. Under Flaubert's advice and encouragement, de Maupassant developed the short story into a great art, and set a standard rarely reached by those who have tried to follow him. He did not write many long novels, but two of them, *Une Vie* and *Bel Ami*, have always seemed to me masterpieces of their kind. They should be read in the original thoroughly to enjoy their full flavour, so typically French are they in sentiment and ideas. Both have that tragic intensity which distinguishes so many of de Maupassant's short stories, interlarded with his wonderful power of depicting character and incident with magnificent realism; and both are sad beyond words—as indeed are many of his short stories.

But there was a side to Guy de Maupassant's character not so well known to those who only read him for "entertainment." This was his hatred of war. He shows throughout all those wonderful stories depicting the Franco-Prussian war—stories like the unforgettable *Boule de Suif*—but even Frenchmen are apt to forget what he wrote besides on war so much did the novelist outshine the pacifist. His bitterest denunciation of war will be found in the small volume of his yachting experiences, entitled *Sur L'Eau*. It is quite a modest work on cruising round the Mediterranean. "It contained," he said, "no story or interesting adventure, but just a few of the things seen and thought about while on the cruise."

It was when he saw some soldiers on the march that he thought of war. He wrote :—

When I think of this word alone—war—I get absolutely terrified, as if somebody mentioned the Inquisition or sorcery—something abominable, monstrous, against nature. When we speak of cannibals we smile with pride as we proclaim our superiority over these savages, the real savages. Over those who fight to eat the vanquished, or over those who fight merely to kill, and nothing else but to kill?

The youngsters marching there are destined for death just as much as bullocks forced to the slaughter-house by butchers. They will die on the field of battle, their heads split open by a sword or their bodies pierced by a bullet; and they could have worked and produced.

De Maupassant pities the poor old parents who have brought up children with such care and trouble, and at such cost of labour and money. Why have they killed the poor boy, the splendid boy, the sole hope, the pride of their life?

War! To fight! To cut one another's throats! To massacre men! And remember we have to-day in

this, our civilization, with our advancement in science and philosophy, schools where one is taught to kill, to kill from afar, and as many men as possible, poor innocent devils, fathers of families, and with no genuine reason. And the terrible thing is that the people don't rise against the Government. What is the difference in this between monarchies and republics? Why do not all peoples recoil at the bare word—war?

He recognized how enslaved we are to old customs, criminal prejudices, ferocious ideas, mostly inherited from our barbarous ancestors; but are we to remain like beasts, bound by instinct, never changing? Why can we not shout out, like Victor Hugo, "Let us dishonour war!"

De Maupassant quotes Von Moltke—he names him a "butcher of genius"—words which that "great" soldier addressed to some pacifists :—

War is saintly, a divine institution. It is one of the most sacred laws of nature. It brings out of man all the great and noble sentiments such as honour, disinterestedness, virtue, and courage. Above all, it prevents men from falling into the most hideous materialism.

Thus Von Moltke, the German soldier—who, by the way, lived till he was ninety-one. He certainly did not die a soldier's death. De Maupassant continues :—

To bring together four hundred thousand men, make them march night and day without rest, thinking of nothing, studying nothing, reading nothing, useful to nobody, rotten in their filth, sleeping in foulness, living like brutes, pillaging towns, burning villages, ruining people, then meeting a similar conglomeration of human beings upon whom they throw themselves causing rivers of blood to run, with human flesh mixed pell-mell in the red mud, and leaving awful bits of carcasses with arms or legs blown off or brains blown out, or dying in a corner of a field while your old parents, your wife and your children die of hunger—that is what is called not falling into the most hideous materialism.

War-mongers are the scourge of the world. We fight against nature to make our lives a little easier. Our great men wear themselves out in working for and succouring their brothers. Then war comes. In six months our generals have destroyed twenty years of effort, patience and genius. This is what is called not falling into the most hideous materialism. We have seen war. We have seen men become brutes, killing for pleasure, or terror, or bravado, or even for ostentation. Justice then exists no more, law and order are dead, and all ideas of right and wrong vanish. We have seen innocent people shot merely because they showed terror. We have seen dogs chained up and shot by their masters merely to try out a new revolver. We have seen cows lying in a field slaughtered by machine-gun fire for no reason at all—just to cause a laugh. This is what is called not falling into the most hideous materialism.

To invade a country, slaughter a man defending his home merely because he does not wear a military hat, burn down houses, either smash or steal the furniture, get drunk or violate women in the street, blow up millions of pounds in shells, and leave behind a trail of misery and disease—this is what is called not falling into the most hideous materialism.

Besides, what have these war-mongers done to show that they possess even a little intelligence? Nothing whatever. What have they invented? Powder and shot. That's all.

De Maupassant reviews some of the great inventions and then asks :—

What have we inherited from Greece? Books and marbles. Is she considered great because she conquered, or because she produced? Was it the Persian invasion which prevented her from falling into the most hideous materialism? Was it the Barbarian invasions which saved and regenerated

Rome? Did Napoleon consolidate the great intellectual movements initiated by the great philosophers of the eighteenth century?

If Governments take the right to condemn the people to death, it is not astonishing that sometimes it is the people who take the right to put to death the Government. No one has the absolute right to govern others—except to rule for the good of those governed. And those who govern ought to avoid war as much as a captain of a ship avoids shipwreck.

Why should we not sit in judgment on those governments which declare war?

If only the nations understood their power, if they themselves meted out justice to the governing murdering classes, if they refused to allow themselves to be killed without reason, if they even used their arms against those who gave them for killing, on that day war would *die!* . . . Alas, that day will never come!

My rough translation cannot do justice to the original; but the burning hatred for war felt by the great author is, I hope, clearly seen. Had Guy de Maupassant (who was, I may say in passing, an Atheist) not been struck down by a fell disease before he was fifty, he might have lived to see what the "Great" War produced in foulness; it would have proved interesting to hear what he could have said over that terrible event. But he was, in some measure, quite right. The people—you and me—the nobodies—all over the world, hate and loathe war. But, except to protest, what can we do? Is it possible *always* for even Governments to avoid war? Can a nation always have the Government it wants?

Can we, even now, say with Guy de Maupassant, that the day when war will be abolished will *never* come? I think that the great day is nearer than some people imagine.

H. CUTNER.

## Good Friday

It has recently been my good fortune to find in an old trunk of ancient papers a remarkable and apparently very valuable document, which I think will prove of great interest to readers of the *Freethinker*. It is nothing less than the leading article of the *Nazareth and District Scribe*, published about April 13, 30: its value to historians is obviously incalculable, and it should enable much of the controversy about the first Easter to be settled.

I feel that Freethinkers, who have done so much to elucidate this vexed question of the Spring Festival, should be the first to learn the details of this far-off event, so I am here reproducing the article in its entirety.

### IS THE EAGLE MOULTING?

For years we have done all in our power in the columns of this journal to weld our nation into one universal protest against the tyranny of Roman rule. At times the task has seemed almost beyond us, the pen has seemed as if weighted with lead, but we have never despaired: in our darkest hours we have never begrudged the labour expended on this noble duty. Always it has been our cry that Rome is decadent, and that the Jewish nation suffers a most degrading insult all the while she allows herself to be dominated by pagan pirates. The Jews are God's chosen people, and if they will but live up to their warlike traditions they will soon be free of the yoke of a heathen race.

If any further proofs of our opinions were still necessary, they were supplied last Friday at the trial of Jesus, the Nazarene, in the Temple Hall of Justice at Jerusalem, on a long list of charges, all of which were of a serious character. There was displayed then the worst example on record of the irreligious

tolerance and decadence of Roman outlook, although the trial eventually proved to be a vindication of our unshakeable Jewish loyalty to tradition.

No trial in the history of criminal procedure has occasioned so much astonishment or caused so great an outcry. It will be remembered that the accused was charged, amongst other things, with blasphemy, sedition, brawling, contempt for authority and unlawfully resisting arrest, and wounding an officer of the law. Throughout the trial Jesus exhibited a contemptuous and defiant attitude, and yet Pilate did not rebuke him once; in fact he actually pampered this disgraceful criminal, and even attempted to shield him from the consequences of his guilt. And then, to crown his scandalous behaviour, he rendered a summing-up that was not only a flagrant disregard of Jewish tradition, but was an insult to our Yahweh. He sneered at our beliefs and flouted our priesthood. We would demand his recall to Rome, except that it would merely result in another degenerate representative of this effete empire, when our real need is for the overthrow of this hated Government.

Our readers will recall that the Counsel for the Prosecution proved every charge against the prisoner up to the hilt, and that the defence, conducted by a lawyer known to be sympathetic to Roman rule, admitted the allegations, but sought to exonerate Jesus on the score of insanity. This plea of insanity can be ignored, it was merely a red-herring trail. The main thing is that both sides admitted the truth of the charges, and yet in the face of that Pilate summed-up with an arrogant disregard for justice. We feel it necessary, in the interests of the nation, to include that summing-up verbatim in this article.

"Not often has it fallen to my lot to adjudicate in such a case as this. Amidst a welter of accusations and an overwhelming mass of evidence—largely the outcome of hate and spite—I find two main charges, to wit, blasphemy and sedition. The blasphemy, it must be remembered, is against some obscure Jewish God, the sedition is against Jewish law. Nowhere can I detect the slightest trace of either of these crimes having been directed against Roman law. The prisoner has not blasphemed against any of the Roman gods, neither has he engaged in acts subversive to Roman rule. That blasphemy and sedition are indictable offences in Roman law is true, but in both cases the crime would need to be of a much more serious nature than is observable in this trial.

"Jesus claims that he is the Son of God. Well, in Judea, it may be so. I do not know. In Rome, where many are sons of gods, his claim would be ridiculed, not treated seriously in a High Court. While he bears the appearance of an honest, if simple, man, he has not attained that fame and illustrious honour that would entitle him to be considered of divine origin. But in Judea it seems to be blasphemous to claim a god as father; perhaps it is that none in this land reach the heights of nobility necessary for such honour.

"As for his acts of sedition, it is contended that he has spoken in contemptuous terms of his superiors, and has derided the priestly rulers of the nation. Again, he has merely broken the taboos of a comparatively insignificant tribe, he has not ruffled a feather of the Imperial Eagle. On the contrary, did he not counsel an audience to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's? That may make him a traitor in Judea, but his sentiments bid fair to qualify him for citizenship of the proud Roman Empire.

"The prosecution seems to be very much concerned about the prisoner's claim to have walked on water, to have changed water into wine, and to have raised the dead to life. Again, it may be so, I do not know,

The prosecution says that such claims are blasphemous; the defence thinks they point to an insane mind. I care little for these quibbles. If Jesus did not do them he is deluded; if he did, then he is perhaps a philosopher with much wisdom and knowledge. But delusion is not a crime and wisdom is not insanity, at least in civilized states. The standards are apparently different in Judea.

"For his attack on the money-changers, for his resistance to arrest, and for his unlawful wounding of an officer, I would suggest that he be punished by a heavy sentence; but for these other trivial charges of blasphemy and sedition, I most strongly recommend that they be ignored, they are ludicrous in the extreme.

"Those of you who so ardently desire this man's death will do more to spread his ideas by your overweening hate than he himself will do in a lifetime of street-corner speaking, while his death under the law will endear his memory as a martyr and strengthen his following.

"However, I see that you are determined on your ill-judged course. Your dissentient voices tell me that too plainly. Unless there is less disorder I will have the soldiers clear the court. I had hoped that you would be guided by the wiser counsels of a better civilization than your own, that you had learned in these years to ignore priestly domination, that you were at least on the way to a more progressive outlook. But I see all the signs still of fanatical nationalism and intolerant superstition.

"So be it. Barabbas shall be delivered to you. This man Jesus shall be given to your offended priests to satisfy their bloodlust. Some day you will regret this cowardly obedience to parasites, but your way to that liberty is long and hard. And the task for Imperial Rome is mighty."

That is Pilate's degenerate outlook in all its vicious hopelessness. Are we, the chosen of the Most High, to have our most cherished laws and traditions, given to us by Yahweh Himself, flouted and sneered at by this despicable tyrant. What care we for this civilization idea? It has no place in Yahweh's scheme; it can have no place in ours. Let us determine now that we will be rid of these Romans. They are a decadent race. Let us strike now before their rot affects us. We believe in the priest and his divine authority. It shall not be scorned by this bubble civilization, with its destructive ideas of progress.

The more I read that article, cut ages ago from a long-forgotten Nazareth paper, the more I realize how easily it could be written to-day. Pilate could denounce just as cuttingly our bigoted nationalism and our slavish obedience to priestly domination. He was right, it is a long road from superstition to civilization. After nearly 2,000 years we still persecute for similar crimes: with all our vaunted love of liberty and our proud boast of being civilized, even yet the road is long and the pathway hard

NEUTRONUS.

The sidesmen at church are the men who sit about against the wall.

They don't attend to the service like the people who come.

In baptism you start life again, that is why you are done when you are very small.

The Decalogue is the ten longest books in the Bible. Surely to goodness mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

The Prodigal Son wasted his substance on riotous loving.

From "Latest Howlers," by Cecil Hunt.

## Acid Drops

At a Free Church Conference, the other day, Mr. Baldwin protested against the autocracies that had been created in different parts of the world. So far good. But the worst feature of autocracies is the secrecy with which they work. There has never been an autocracy which dared to let its conduct be made wholly public; for there is such a thing as public feeling and public opinion in the most complete of autocracies, and no Government dares to ignore it. To be badly ruled the public must, to a very considerable extent, be cleverly fooled, and public information is still the greatest preventative to this being done.

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that the British delegates at Geneva, representing a Government of which Mr. Baldwin is the effective head, showed themselves, on April 10, entirely opposed to inspection of arms at places of manufacture. In this they were supported by Italy and Poland. And in the United States the British Ambassador has officially protested against there being made public the arrangements between the British Government and its agents in America concerning the purchase of munitions and the arrangements for war loans. Mr. Baldwin is, of course, an honourable man—so are they all honourable men, but it is a little puzzling to know how we are ever going to stop war if all that is vital to the creation of war is to be kept secret from the general public. And how are we going to control armaments if inspection is not to be permitted in countries where arms are made? Denunciations of autocracy and the maintenance of secrecy with regard to the conduct of wars and the preparations for wars, hardly seem to go well together.

Generally people who make themselves a nuisance in the name of religion are licenced offenders. The Salvation Army are the greatest offenders in this direction, for they are permitted by the police to spread their meetings all over a road, and often resent being made to move to permit traffic. Now and then some of these licenced nuisances are pulled up, and a curious case came before Mr. Justice Eve. A man applied for an injunction to prevent a Mrs. Stutely from annoying him with her prayers. The party wall between the residences of the two parties was very thin, and Mrs. Stutely was not in the habit of talking to the Lord quietly. The application was to stop the lady from "moaning, groaning, making mournful noises and praying in a loud voice." Mr. Justice Eve decided that talking to the Lord in this way was unneighbourly and granted the injunction. What the Lord thought about the moaning and groaning, or about Mr. Justice Eve's decision we do not know, but he will have to account for this one day, particularly when the number of those who pray are getting smaller every year.

The Presbytery of Southgate (Dundee) reports a decrease in the number of attendants at Bible classes and Sunday Schools. Worse than this, we imagine, there has been a decrease in the donations. Some of the money has gone on ice cream or cinemas

The Glasgow Presbytery reports a loss, according to the *Glasgow Herald*, of April 3, of 26,000 members. Over 107,000 have been lost during the past four years. This is all evidence of man's unquenchable thirst for religion.

The Rev. E. G. Southam, of Bournemouth, says that one result of broadcasting religious services is that it has led to different Churches feeling that they can work together. What an unconscious testimony to the power of Christianity! It has taken only nineteen centuries for some Christians to learn that they can work together. All hail the power of Jesus's name!

Nations pay dearly for their so-called great men. And when a nation is represented by one man who claims to speak for it, logic has got off the lines. *Happy Man*, by Hermann Kesten, translated by Edward Crankshaw is a novel of post-war Berlin; the author sums up certain matters as follows:—

Man is now only a commodity, marriage a statute, love a system, past culture a mistake, future culture a party programme, freedom has changed from a conception to an outworn illusion, humanity to a collective entity, and the individual from a divine atom to the industrial product of an endless belt.

There is an abysmal fallacy in the one-man business of nations which no writers of distinction appear to be willing to tackle, and the fact remains that at this time of day millions cannot be represented by one man.

A correspondent in the *Spectator* points out that it was, he thinks, Dr. Gore

who used to say that if every British Christian would think daily for two minutes on the Day of Judgment the world would be transformed for the better within a year. Christians now have the opportunity of their lives, and we wish them well in the process.

The Pope, who, with twelve cardinals paid a special visit to St. Peters, a few days ago, to pray for the souls of militant Atheists, should now be awaiting results. If he is really acting for God Almighty, something drastic ought to happen. But, will it? Will there be a sudden rush of wicked unbelievers to Church or will—just nothing whatever happen? Will the one-time Atheist be grovelling on his knees before some fancy-dressed priest or will he—well, be actually laughing at the idea that the Pope, his Cardinals, and all their prayers, are worth two hoots? Or even one hoot?

The cost of the peal of bells in the tower of Liverpool Cathedral will be £85,500. £5,500 is in hand, and the chairman of the Executive Committee, who are arranging for the work to be done, is making an immediate appeal for help. We do not doubt for a moment that the sum of money will be raised. But it certainly gives food for melancholy thought how religion still dominates the minds of most people. For religion in general and churches in particular, money seems always to be found. And the destitute and sick can go hang.

As another example we read that the Lord Mayor of Birmingham presided at a great meeting in the Town Hall in aid of a campaign for raising 100,000 guineas for Church extension in the new housing areas of the city. Bishop Barnes spoke in favour of the scheme—should religion decay, he insisted, the characteristic virtues of England would decay also. The Earl of Dudley spoke in hearty support. "Housing estates," said the noble lord, "would not be successes, they would on the contrary, become slums, unless they had souls. That is, they must have churches." The Earl was "greatly concerned that there should be facilities for giving religious teaching to the children." Can the British people withstand such and similar eloquent appeals? We think that the 100,000 guineas will be soon forthcoming.

A Christian reviewer of John Galsworthy's latest book, *The End of the Chapter*, gives some well-deserved tributes to that fine novelist and social historian. But he noticed what has been remarked before about the famous Forsyte saga. Galsworthy was dealing with the late Victorian epoch, and, as an acute observer of the manners of the time, he must have seen the enormous influence of religion during almost the whole of the life of the Forsytes. Yet he deliberately omits it from his work. So our reviewer sadly concludes: "Religion seems to have played no part in the Forsyte family, and in that particular they were not typical of their class or period." Perhaps this was Galsworthy's way of showing his own contempt for religion—a contempt he shared with other great English novelists.

Another pious reviewer, writing in the *Church Times* on Sir Arthur Keith's latest work, *Darwinism and its Critics*, claims that "the overwhelming majority of Anglican theologians accept evolution as a description of how God created the world, and as an account of the descent of man. And they agree in not looking on the Bible in general, or the Book of Genesis in particular, as an authoritative text-book of scientific knowledge." We congratulate this writer on his perspicuity. But it is a pity some of the Bishops, for example, do not talk like this from their pulpits, and do not insist on this criticism of the Bible and Genesis being taught in all our schools. Apart from the difficulty in trying to understand how evolution is "a description of how God created the world," we feel we have made some progress with "Anglican theologians." All we want now is a good solid broadcast Sunday lecture on these lines by one of the theologians. Would Sir John Reith mind?

According to a review of Hilaire Belloc's book *Milton*, the author frankly dislikes that great man's advocacy of divorce. That should go without saying, and although Milton is terribly at ease with Our Lord, this does not alter the fact that he tried to humanize the institution of marriage, as he had ample experience to provoke him. Mr. Belloc writes of Milton:—

He died disbelieving the omnipotence of his Creator, the divinity of his Saviour, and the native immortality of mankind.

This will not cause Milton to sleep less soundly, as the grand old poet reckoned freedom on a different basis than the Catholic estimate. The only freedom that Rome gives is freedom to be a Catholic.

A writer in the *Christian World* is frank enough to "defy anybody but a Gandhi to be religious on an empty stomach." But many of Gandhi's fellow-Asiatics are known as "Rice Christians," which is another way of saying that they would never be Christians unless they were hungry, and had one eye on the Bible and another on the Christian larder.

There are queer forms of "comfort" known as "whistling in the dark." For instance, the Rev. Dr. James Reid, preaching from the text, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me," pretends to believe that "Our very sense of evil means that God is there," because the Bible says, "If I make my bed in hell, Thou art there." It almost seems as if the only way to be gloriously rollickingly happy would be to "take poison, hang yourself over a precipice and shoot yourself," as a comedian once said he did, adding, "if I hadn't been a dam good swimmer, I might have been drowned." The fact of the matter is that if you profess to sell a sure "consolation" in all kinds of trouble, you naturally want lots of people to "suffer" so that you can find a market for your dope.

On a strictly business basis we suppose, the North Sussex Sunday School Union has sent a protest to the East Grinstead (Sussex) Urban Council against the opening of the Swimming Baths on Sunday afternoons. The reason given is "a falling off in Sunday school attendances."

The Pope bitterly denounced war at a consistorial meeting in Rome. We believe it was a harmless poet, Goldsmith, who wrote:—

"If every one his own doorstep swept  
The village would be clean."

There is plenty of war roaring from Italy at present, and we would advise the Pope to buy a broom.

It is, of course, to be expected that the Dean of Exeter believes in the Resurrection but the Ascension. . . ! Here is what he says about that wonderful happening, for the edification of his fellow believers:—

The Ascension is a further emancipation. The Risen but not yet ascended Christ is still only available for

those who happen to be there at the time. He has as yet no point of contact with twentieth century England or even with fourth century Nicea. The Ascension sets Him in a region—or, if you like, follow the traditional language and say, at a level—where he is beyond both space and time, where physical frontiers have no inhibiting effect, and all centuries are seen, as by the eye of God, in the Eternal Now. . . .

and so on, only worse. It would be very illuminating to find one of the Dean's simple curates trying to expound the Ascension on these lines to almost any intelligent audience. Yet this kind of thing actually has a market value!

Describing a new book on the Catholic Church, a critic says that "the Church is, incidentally, one of the greatest business organizations in the world, if not the greatest." We heartily agree. To be able to draw hard cash in almost superfluous abundance from millions of people for centuries with the definite promise of paying dividends for certain, *in Heaven*, shows proof of marvellous business acumen. And it is even more wonderful to be able to make these people believe that the dividends *have* been paid. The great asset of the bondholders is Faith. The great asset of the Church is hard cash. So they are both happy.

An unimportant detail of the coming "Jubilee" (really not a Jubilee, which means the fiftieth year), is the extraordinary request of the Archbishop of Canterbury that Churches should not let God get any inkling in advance of the nature of requests to be laid before Him on May 6. Is the Archbishop afraid God will then dismiss the Prayer as "old stuff"? Or does he know that a congregation's "familiarity" with this rubbish is bound to produce the proverbial "contempt."

A religious weekly seems surprised to find that Bourne-mouth is one of the most pious towns in England. Allowing for exaggerations, natural enough when there is no official census of church-goers, it would appear that the churches have about as many members as there are inhabitants, or at least that the churches are always filled to capacity strength. The Mayor is a preacher, and the corporation tries hard to prevent all competing entertainments on the Sabbath Day. Add to this that Bourne-mouth is crowded with rich invalids, whose nearness to the grave makes them very generous supporters of a creed they have never taken the trouble to study scientifically—and one understands the prosperity of religion in this "exclusive resort."

The meanness of puritanical sanctimoniousness is well illustrated in the advertisement of the "Temperance and Social Welfare Committee." They want to close a cinema on Sunday, they obviously know of no ground for alleging breach of local regulations, and it is not enough merely to appeal to the authorities that the "moy" should close down because this wretched self-appointed "committee" hates all happiness on its fetich-day. It therefore advertises:—

In localities where Sunday opening of cinemas prevails, the Standing Committee suggest it should be remembered that the licence for a cinema is in force for not longer than one year, and is therefore subject to annual renewal. If it can be shown that any local regulation in respect of the Sunday licence has been contravened by a particular cinema, especially in regard to the nature of the films exhibited, opposition to the renewal of the licence can be made on such grounds. Correspondence on this issue will be welcomed by the Department.

Could humbug go farther?

It seems strange that a national service like the B.B.C. should advertise meetings of any kind. But imagine the furore the N.S.S. would create if a speaker in broadcasting a "talk" went out of his way to get broadcast publicity for a Secularist meeting. Yet Gipsy Smith advertised a meeting of his when addressing listeners in a few days ago. The *Methodist Recorder* chirruped glee-

fully that Smith "managed neatly to get in a word about the unique service to be held on May 11." As to its uniqueness, it is as unique as every meeting which the ex-Gipsy has been addressing daily for half a century past.

The Methodist Church has a very active "Press Bureau," which boasts its "influence" with the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *News-Chronicle*, *Daily Herald*, and other named papers in London. "At present," it says, "the Methodist Press Bureau has not established contact" with the provincial press, "but this matter will be pressed forward." What with Catholic underhand influence and Methodist boldly boasted power in the press, we are justified in saying that the *Freethinker* more than ever deserves popular support. It is one of the few journals nowadays which can neither be bought nor intimidated.

The *Christian World* boldly proclaims on its title-page each week: "In all things—Charity." On page two in its article, "The Church Could Work Miracles," we read the writer's opinion of some fellow-Christian teachers. He is describing a "young intellectual" who preaches some shade of doctrine a trifle different from that of his critic's. The latter points the usual "lesson." "There lies the tragedy of Modernism, its moral weakness. . . . Every Sunday morning there is quite a collection of young women at the back of this church. I can only conclude that my friend's unusual good looks are the attraction." The despicable innuendo is only equalled by the cant of the word "friend," unless we understand that if this creature were talking about an enemy his suggestiveness would have been still more offensive.

The Rev. John Bevan pursues his Modernist way, heedless of the abuse generously showered upon him by his fellow-Christians. His latest criticism deals "faithfully" with that lunatic work, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Mr. Bevan says: "I fail to see what guidance or spiritual help his apocalypticism can possibly give to us two thousand years after. . . . The apocalyptic view of history and Divine intervention upon which it is based is obsolete." This quotation would go amongst our "Sugar Plums," only we don't like Mr. Bevan's vestigial remains of the old theology in recognizing still "the frequent flashes of spiritual truth," and the rest of it which Mr. Bevan says "abound in this book." We cannot count ourselves great admirers of "Saint John's" "revelation" (or "flash of spiritual truth") about people being "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." (Rev. xix. 20.)

A letter to the editor of the *Christian World* deserves noting. Mr. G. F. Wates writes to protest against one of Miss Joyce Reason's recent Talks on Christian History. Miss Reason had said about Richard Baxter, "He had only written what God had put into his heart." Mr. Wates quotes Baxter's atrocious delight in contemplating the tortures of hell. "The floor of hell is paved with the skulls of unbaptized infants," and so on. Mr. Wates says very sensibly that "the doctrine of eternal punishment held in Christendom for the greater part of two milleniums is the most awful conception in any religion (except the Mohammedan, which was an imitation of the ideas of Jews and Christians). And our young people should know something about these matters." The young and old will never learn the facts from churches or those responsible for B.B.C. talks.

Dr. H. S. Box has written a defence of the Gospel miracles, and no doubt, it is as good a defence as any other. But it is in the Bishop of Gloucester's Foreword to the book that we find the real jam. He manages a defence in a few lines; for he suggests that "the strongest argument in favour of the credibility of miracles is afforded by the remarkable variety of reasons adduced for not believing in them." *Ergo*, miracles did happen! We challenge even Mr. Chesterton to go one better than that.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE,

EDITORIAL ?

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

Telephone No. : CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

B. CAMPBELL.—We can only suggest an advertisement for your set of Ingersoll's works. We already have a set for office use.

G. GIDEN.—Presumably your address was sent us by someone who was unaware that you already subscribed for this journal. But as you have passed the extra copy along, the purpose of sending has been achieved.

BIRKENHEAD BRANCH N.S.S.—Glad to see that your Branch is keeping an eye on the public press. Such letters do much good.

Will readers who are good enough to send us newspaper cuttings enhance the favour by noting the name and date of the paper from which the cuttings are taken? We have been unable to use several useful cuttings this week on account of this omission.

J. T. BRIGHTON.—Very sorry to hear of your accident. Hope you will soon be completely recovered.

P. J. MORSE.—Many thanks for your practical support and interest.

For Circulating and Advertising the *Freethinker*.—D. Fisher, 38.

D. FISHER.—Of course, what you point out involves a risk, but it would be just the same in the case of any investment, or any localizable property.

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

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

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

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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

The following is from a letter to Professor Gilbert Murray, which appears in the April issue of *Headway*, the organ of the League of Nations Union):—

We have seen Europe cruelly unscrupulous in its politics and commerce, widely spreading slavery over the face of the earth in various names and forms. And yet, in this very same Europe, protest is always alive against its own iniquities. Martyrs are never absent whose lives of sacrifice are the penance for the wrongs done by their own kindred. The individuality which is western is not to be designated by any sectarian name of a particular religion, but is distinguished by its eager attitude towards truth, in two of its aspects, scientific and humanistic. This openness of mind to truth has also its moral value, and so in the West it has often been noticed that, while those who

are professedly pious have sided with tyrannical power, encouraging repression of freedom, the men of intellect, the sceptics, have bravely stood for justice and the rights of man.

I feel proud that I have been born in this great Age. I know that it must take time before we can adjust our minds to a condition which is not only new, but almost exactly the opposite of the old. Let us announce to the world that the light of the morning has come, not for entrenching ourselves behind barriers, but for meeting in mutual understanding and trust on the common field of co-operation.

In the *Eleventh Hour*, a writer, Mr. Jack Common, has an excellent article "From Metaphysics to Men." He has no illusion about the disastrous record of religion, plans and fancy, and, as he is out for a clean sweep, the following extract will show his style and aim:—

To begin with, we'll have to give up the egotism of being a patriot, that is war; to give up the conceit of class, which is poverty; and to give up the comfort of the supernatural, that's evasion. All this for a pruning. So we can get nearer our essential humanity. When that's done, and the world of men consists of men, not of slaves and overseers and gangsters and plansters and drones, there'll be a flowering. The native differences of people will get a chance to show up. We shall be able to look freely at the heavens, without the shifting, placating glance of fear which so far has made our metaphysics a mixture of uncertain intuition and nightmare. But first cut out the dead wood.

Great thought from the *Sunday Express* in this year of grace, 1935, for readers' spiritual nourishment on the Sabbath:—

Nobody will ever know, quite certainly, what was in Golden Miller's mind.

In concluding his description of the newly discovered "gospel" of Jesus, Dr. H. Idris Bell, of the British Museum, makes some remarkable admissions. He is struck by so many resemblances between it and John, and he tries hard to let his pious readers down lightly. He says:—

Perhaps some readers will be offended by the suggestion that St. John's representation of the teaching of Jesus is in any way imaginative and not a literal transcript of what He said.

But it is only necessary to compare one Gospel with another in order to see how little the Evangelists felt themselves obliged to preserve the *ipsissima verba* of the discourses they reported.

The idea that John could not possibly have put into the mouth of Jesus words which He did not actually speak seems to rest on an ignorance of the methods of ancient historians and biographers.

And Dr. Bell adds, "They freely invented speeches, which they attributed to their characters. . . ." Or, to put it bluntly, John *invented* the speeches of Jesus; and Christians hold up their hands in horror when we ask if the speeches were invented, why not the whole character? By the way, we ought to add that Dr. Bell's article was in the *Sunday Express* for April 14, 1935. We do hope this is late enough for some of our critics.

The merits of Shakespeare have often been analysed, and are familiar to every person of taste. He cannot be measured by the rules of criticism—he understood them not, and has totally disregarded them; but this very circumstance has given room for those beauties of unconfined nature and astonishing ebullitions of genius which delight and surprise in his productions, and which the ruler of the drama would have much confined and repressed. I know not whether there is not something, even in the very absurdities of Shakespeare, which tends, by contrast, to exalt the lustre of his beauties and to elevate the strokes of the sublime.—Tyler.

## Never Apologize

(*The Other Side of the Medal.* Edward Thompson. The Hogarth Press, 5s.)

GOOD wine needs no bush. This is a book which lives on in spite of the conspiracy of silence. It runs from edition to edition, with its merits as the explanation. Its only advertisement is the praise it gets from those who are impressed by it. Those who are impressed by it are those whom truth can always stir and whose type of pride in their nationality is that which needs no falsity to give it substance.

The author has lived long in India, and spent "many years of friendly intercourse with Indians." He is a Christian, but like the brave Bishop Colenso, he does not allow the colour of the skin to be a factor affecting his judgment on matters concerning man and man. He is profoundly conscious that much of what passes as political controversy between Englishmen and Indians is but surface skirmishing over areas packed with unreality. Mr. Thompson starts from the fact that in the mind of the Indian, speaking in a general way, there exists a solid body of hatred for everything English.

That this hatred exists—savage, set hatred—is certain; and the sooner we recognize it, and search for its reasons, the better. The discontent with our rule is growing universal, and there must be, first, widespread popular memories to account for that discontent being able to spread; and, secondly, blazing hatred at its heart, to have caused it to gather such rapid momentum.

The short and easy method with such a symptom is to write it down as original sin, but Mr. Thompson, it will be noticed, looks for causes. He is convinced that he has found them. His methods are as irreproachable as his motives. He writes temperately; he prefers understatement to overstatement, he gives his authorities. His conviction is apparent that the honour of England bears some relation to how many Englishmen there are at this moment willing to admit an unflattering truth when it is brought to their attention, or, conversely, how many there are who still believe that loyalty is a word whose free association is hard lying and who would suppress or distort the facts, if the occasion seemed to call for it, as a simple patriotic duty.

What is it then that is at the root of the trouble which is making so difficult a real reconciliation between the two peoples? It is that body of events which goes to make up what is known historically as the Indian Mutiny, and, more particularly, the persistent misrepresentation of these facts in the British and Indian schoolbooks. "Right at the back of the mind of many an Indian the Mutiny flits as he talks with an Englishman—an unavenged and unappealed ghost." If there were any disposition on the English side, in its histories, to draw a veil over the incidents which discredit Indian reputations, the Indian would be ready to do his share of the forgetting. The memories of the mutiny are not specially exceptional; their brutality is the brutality which always follows in the wake of conquest and colonization. It is conceivable that "raking up the past" on such themes can on occasions be but a mischievous exercise. It would be on this occasion, were it not for the fact that the past is continually being raked up in every school in the kingdom, and the youth of the country and the empire is being forcibly fed on an account of the mutiny which typifies Indian action under the incident of the Black Hole of Calcutta and represents the march of the Conqueror as that of an avenging Justice.

In these circumstances the desire not to rake up the past can only be regarded as a sickly hypocrisy. Nowadays, it is not so much the horrible story of how *Justice was done* in India after the Mutiny that perturbs the enlightened Indian. It is the reluctance that the Englishman has even at this time of day, to say and write the magnanimous word. Magnanimous is not, of course, the right adjective to use; what is required is the honest word, the decent word. If the deeds perpetrated by Englishmen about eighty years ago were written of to-day as the unfortunate incidents of a day forever dead, then the Indian would recognize a new Englishman and a better day would have dawned. No one of intelligence blames a race for its ancient misdeeds, any more than he blames a man for the sins of his childhood. Eternal punishment is only fit for the gods. But other dogmas besides theological ones take an unconscionable time in dying. The militarist ethical code does not change; and, as with the theologian, grant him but a few premises, and he can argue very logically therefrom. "Never apologize" is one of the military commandments. The words *must* come all the same, but they will come from lips chanting in a new key. And if they must come sooner or later, why not sooner than later, so that adjustment may the more speedily commence? Until this happens any real understanding between the Indians and the English is impossible. Till then there will be something lacking of perfect chivalry "when Englishmen write of Kalidasa or Indians of Shakespeare."

The Author is sanguine, we hope not too sanguine, that it is only necessary

for my race to understand what has been done in its name, for them to make short work of the fiction and the "history" that they have been giving their own boys and forcing upon Indian boys reading in the schools we have established.

He also says:—

When one side has succeeded in imposing its version of events on the whole world, when one side controls history or the press, then underground bitterness becomes something too poisoned and ferocious for expression.

Well, not *all* the press. Mr. Thompson's account of the events round about the Mutiny will be given here in brief. It is perhaps advisable to remind readers once more of the scrupulousness of his documentation, and to refer them to the book itself. One is indebted to the Author for several illustrations of how Christians of eminence testified to their approval of almost incredible atrocities when perpetrated by Britons. We think it only fair to him, because of this, to acknowledge without comment, his statement made in the introduction that

truth and fairness are more essential parts of religion than even a wise expediency.

One other preliminary word. Mr. Thompson complains of the lack of interest in India taken by our Members of Parliament. It was not ever thus. There was one member known as the "Member for India," whose interest in India's teeming population was genuine, and whose efforts on their behalf were unparing. His name was Charles Bradlaugh.

(To be concluded)

T.H.E.

Socrates said he was surprised that a sculptor should employ his whole attention to fashion an insensible stone into the likeness of a man, and that a man should take so little pains not to resemble an insensible stone.

Rollin.

## The Leading Religion of India

### I.

INDIAN unrest and the projected reforms in government and administration in that important Presidency now command considerable attention, not only in England, but throughout the world. Subtle and complex are the problems presented in that multitudinous peninsula, with its separate races in different stages of development, as well as its many contending creeds. A land of races and religions, it is indeed difficult to hazard any forecast of India's future, even when some acquaintance is made with the various theological customs and beliefs of its teeming population.

The premier cult of India is termed Hinduism, which claims about 240 million adherents. The word *Hindu* includes both a native of India and a member of the Hindu Communion. Broadly considered, a Hindu is one who reveres the Brahmanic Sacred Books and venerates the cult's traditions as divinely inspired. To him the cow is a holy animal; he adores the gods, and strictly observes the rules of caste, both with reference to matrimony and the taking of food. It is also essential to observe the ritual ordained by the Brahman priests, and to utilize their ministrations in all rites and ceremonies associated with nativity, matrimony and death. These customs are common to all Hindus. But it is erroneous to conclude that the many distinct stocks who are classed as Hindus are the adherents of a rigid religion such as orthodox Catholicism. For within their communion we find marked dissimilarities in modes of worship, and in local belief concerning traditions and other aspects of their cult. With a countless array of divinities and a highly elaborated mythology, Hindu ceremonies vary enormously from centre to centre, as do also the deities to whom they are devoted.

More than a million gods are worshipped by the Hindu populace, several of them the deified ghosts of men recently living. But a wide distinction must be made between the tribal gods and saints adored by the motley multitude and those revered by the cultured classes. Much as we find exoteric Buddhism among the uninitiated, and an esoteric form of that philosophy the faith of the more refined, so there exists the Hinduism of popular belief, as well as that of initiates which is barely distinguishable from pure Pantheism. This latter faith, as that keen observer Sir Alfred Lyall tells us, embraces the belief that "all the countless deities, and all the great forces and operations of Nature, such as the winds, the rivers, the earthquakes, the pestilences, are merely direct manifestations of the all-pervading divine energy which shows itself in numberless forms and manners." Also, that "God is substantially identical with Nature, so that in worshipping Nature, whether animate or inanimate, you actually worship God, and in adoring the idol you show reverence to the symbol or emblem of divinity." The popular devotion to idols, fetishes, animals, dead or living, is thus defended, while a deeper esoteric doctrine affirms that the entire world presented to human consciousness is utterly illusory.

India's past history serves to explain the heterogeneous character of its creeds. At the moment, there are innumerable tribes and peoples in several ascending stages of civilization, and within the historical period no single potentate or policy has ever governed the entire peninsula. Hence the indefiniteness, if not chaos, that characterizes its creeds and social customs. Not only do the household, tribal, local, and even universal divinities vary, but their

particular rites and ceremonial differ greatly from place to place. Again, new objects of worship may be chosen at any moment, while other departures are constantly made.

Hinduism is pre-eminently a cult of caste, and to one of these classes every adherent of the religion is attached. The term *caste* dates from Portuguese intrusion into India, although the system itself is very ancient. It applies generally to four classes of natives who eat together and intermarry, while refraining from wedlock and social intercourse with outsiders. Race and profession, however, regulate caste distinctions to an even greater degree than diversity of belief, although its regulations are all decided by the Brahman priests.

The Brahmans compose the superior caste. Next in importance is that of warriors, and then follows the merchant caste, while the fourth, the *Sudras*, embraces all the inferior sub-divisions of the faithful. All these divisions revere the sacred script, but in contemporary India, the only caste that persists in its earlier form is that of the Brahmans. As one authority states: "The cardinal principle which underlies the system of caste is the preservation of the purity of descent, the purity of religious belief and ceremonial usage." But the Hindu population is now segregated into numberless castes and sects. The Brahmans alone constitute a special order in Indian society, and they remain the hereditary interpreters and custodians of all sacred things.

The Vedas are the earliest Hindu writings. The most ancient—the Rig Veda hymns—announce the sublime processes of the elements in eloquent language. The awe inspired by the giant forces of Nature arouse sentiments of pious resignation in the heart of the devotee. The solar fire and the lightning's flame are personified as Agni, while Indra denotes the bright and cloudless firmament, and the *Murats* typify the winds. *Surya* is the sun, and *Ushas* symbolizes the dawn and Nature in her multitudinous manifestations. These potent powers are invoked for the aid they may render, for they confer cattle, rain, health and other blessings upon the beseeching people. Sinners are punished and, above all, those who neglect their duty in providing sacrifices and offering praise to the gods. The offering most acceptable to the deities seems to have been the sacred juice of the *Soma*, or moon plant which, duly fermented, became a highly exhilarating and intoxicating drink. The Vedas are said to have been originally revealed to certain inspired saints—the *Rishis*—who reduced them to writing. That eminent Orientalist, Sir Monier Williams, arranged the Vedas into three divisions: Rules of Ritual and Worship; Texts and Metrical Hymns, and Mystical Doctrines.

The supreme gods of Hinduism bear the names of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the emblems of creation, preservation and death. Brahma the begetter is the lofty intelligence that brought the universe into existence. But, this stupendous task accomplished, he betrayed little further interest in the world's affairs. A divinity so distant and unconcerned troubles the average worshipper but little, and few temples to his honour and glory have been erected. As a rule, pious Hindus venerate Vishnu or Siva, but unfortunately, the devotees of the former exhibit little love towards those who adore the latter.

The preserver, Vishnu, possesses a spouse, *Lakshmi*, who presides over plenty and prosperity. In some respects Vishnu ranks above Siva, and his most pleasing aspect is that of tranquillity, and the god, in moments of repose, personifies the Eternal Spirit of Nature. But while Brahma remains insensitive to human suffering, Vishnu is inclined to listen and respond to the appeals, both of men and the minor

deities. Also, he may be persuaded to descend to earth from his sacred dwelling-place in times of trouble and affliction in order to set matters right. Such descents assume the form of Vishnu's incarnation similar to that of Jehovah in Jesus. This deity's most celebrated embodiments were those of Rana and Krishna, whose careers were signalized by mighty deeds, both natural and miraculous. Rana is depicted as a powerful warrior in India's greatest epic poem. Krishna, who bears a remarkable resemblance to Christ is a very popular deity in certain parts of India. This doctrine of divine embodiment is an outstanding feature in Hinduism, for it links the spiritual powers with mundane affairs through the presence among men of a great deity incarnate. Indeed, all the famous exploits of eminent Indians are attributed to the presence of mighty Vishnu on earth. Vishnu has also entered the bodies of lower animals such as fishes, the tortoise, lion and boar. As incarnations of the god these organisms are adored in various areas of India. Animal and fetish worship form part of the superstitions of aboriginal India, and, as these backward races are absorbed within Hinduism, their accustomed beliefs are slowly adapted to the cult of Vishnu in his many manifestations in bird, beast and tree, and even stocks and stones. Lyall, who resided long in India, refers to an instance "where a boar was worshipped by a tribe of hillmen in Central India. Now, the boar is one of Vishnu's famous incarnations; and as the hillmen became Hinduized, it is quite natural and obvious that Vishnu should be discovered in the animal so that the hillmen had only to understand that they had been worshipping the great god unawares. This tribe was rapidly passing into Hinduism under my eyes." This easy evolution of one mode of faith into that of another is in constant operation in the less advanced areas. Nor in thus obtaining recruits can the Brahmans be justly accused of wilful deception as they assert that in reality, even the potent god Vishnu himself is simply a visible manifestation of the inscrutable underlying energy which sustains the universe. All heroic or humane actions performed by men are therefore traceable to the unseen presence of Vishnu, who exerts a constantly beneficent influence over the little lives of men.

T. F. PALMER.

## The Old School

### I.

BEING a Church School its atmosphere was religious. Vicars of the Parish spoke of "our schools" as they did of "our church." Some explained they included the parishioners in the possessive pronoun. One, stout and pompous, but simple-minded, said "our schools" in a way to make it clear he meant "my school."

The plural was more explanatory. The girls and infants remained in the old block. A new red brick building housed the boys a quarter-mile away. By it stood the Headmaster's house.

Each day's proceedings began with the ringing of the big bell hanging in the tower. Those who lived within sound of the bell took sporting chances. It started to ring at five minutes to nine and two o'clock. The game was to stay home till the tolling began, and then race to school.

Only fast runners could get there in time to fall into line. Those who failed had to face the penalties of lateness, and the ignominy of condemnation as poor runners, summarized in the one scornful word "duckfoot!"

Standard Seven boys assembled round the Headmaster's house steps. On his appearance their hands were raised, with a chorus of "Please sir, may I ring the bell?"

The selected one was proud of the honour, belling, influenced by the Church, being regarded as a great art. The boy who rang the bell stayed out from prayers, a high privilege, and assembled the late-comers to parade at the Head's desk for inquiries and punishment.

### II.

Those were minor items. What mattered was religious exercises. Having chorused "Good-morning Sir," in response to the Head's "Good-morning boys," we knelt and said "Amen" to several prayers from the Anglican Office, after which we all joined in the Lord's Prayer. Standing, we sang a hymn, accompanied by the Head on an old harmonium.

Why did we sing "New every morning is the love" to the tune "Melcombe" so often, once or more every week? It grew wearisome in seven years. To this day the sound of that hymn makes me tired.

After that we dismissed into three groups for a forty-minute Scripture lesson.

The juniors had oral instruction in the Creation, Old Testament characters, the Catechism, and hymns, prayers and texts, with much chanting aloud of the sacred words.

Once a week the middle division wrote Catechism on slates. We did much drawing and naughts-and-crosses. A squeaky pencil was a joy, and the slates made pleasing rattle on the desks.

The senior class went to the one class-room and Bibles were distributed. Till the Head came the youngest pupil-teacher took charge, and there was disorder. We read aloud, a verse each, or silently at the prescribed chapter. This private study was a wicked joy. We hunted out Rabelaisian passages in the Bible, of which there are hundreds.

Expounding the Bible to us in great detail the Headmaster linked it with the orthodoxies of the Anglican Church.

Why did we concentrate on the historical books and the Gospels? We should have been taught the beauties of Ruth, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Job, some of the Prophets, and the shorter epistles, like James. Nearly all of value in the Bible we missed.

The chronological books were easier to teach and examine. For children to name the twelve sons of Jacob won the school commendation. I doubt its spiritual content.

We worked through the Prayer Book except the Offices for Matrimony, the Burial of the Dead, and the Churching of Women, venturing into the technique of theology. I remember seven sorts of Prayers, all named. Obsecration lingers in mind. The word intrigued me. It had a slightly improper sound. I wondered at its being pleasing to God.

Curates came once a week to take Scripture. Then the class-room mildly resembled a bear-garden. At that age we discovered one can ask unanswerable questions in religion. Till a Vicar arrived who is today a well-known figure. He had a head like Julius Cæsar, and eyes and a biting tongue which preserved order.

At twelve o'clock, to the tune Old Hundredth, we sang:—

"Be present at our table, Lord;  
Be here and everywhere adored.  
These creatures bless, and grant that we  
May feast in paradise with thee."

At two o'clock:—

"We thank the, Lord, for this our food,  
But more because of Jesu's blood;  
Let manna to our souls be given,  
The bread of life send down from heaven."

Prayers and a hymn precluded dispersal at half-past four.

Once a year the Bishop's examiner came; a great day. One jolly old parson had all the hymns sung we knew, he taking the bass magnificently.

His successor was lean and sharp-featured, inquisitioning us as if we were heretics.

The little boys scored. They were examined first and dismissed. It meant a half-day for all of us so we appreciated Scripture Inspection.

On Ash Wednesday and Holy Thursday we marched to Church for a service, with the rest of the day free.

### III.

Did we do anything else in school beside Scripture? Yes. Though that was the chief subject.

For reading we stood around the stove in a semi-circle and read a paragraph each aloud. The books were dry moral stuff. We did everything we dared except look at them, save the fast readers, who were liable to smacks for reading pages ahead.

In the top class we had a sentimentalized book on kindness to animals, calculated to make any healthy boy go out and throw stones at the first dog or cat or bird. Rats were the pet yearning of the author, Ernest Bell.

"Strong Reasons Against Strong Drink" was dry enough to give us life-long thirsts. What the modern child does escape! Or doesn't he?

I attribute my bad handwriting to spending hours copying ethical aphorisms down the pages of copy-books. The engraved headlines were impossible; a disheartening standard of flowing curves.

There were large quantities of Transcription and Dictation, allied with Spelling and Grammar. We were not thought capable of expressing ideas, so did merely one formal essay a week in the top class.

Arithmetic was a great subject, mostly mechanical operations with big numbers. The Head was a mathematician, taking us senior boys a surprising distance. I found Geometry fascinating. It was logical and clean, free from the fog which surrounded much of what we did.

History kept us groping about in remote centuries, principally the doings of Kings and their Wars. In Geography we memorized thousands of names, chiefly the British Isles and Empire. Singing meant much modulation and a little theory, with songs national, patriotic and old.

The junior songs were hearty and moralistic. I cannot forget:—

"There was a lad, a cheerful lad,  
Whose face was always bright.  
When any trouble crossed his path  
Alright! said he, Alright!"

Against the drawing methods I feel resentment now. A chart of conventional patterns was hung on the blackboard. Guide lines had to be drawn before the balanced shape was attempted. A hot and angry teacher rushed from boy to boy, rubbing out, shouting, slapping, urging, and doing bits for pupils.

The authorities had not discovered that, given the materials, children will draw, better than most adults, and revel in it.

### IV.

Were there any pleasant moments?

I suppose I must say Yes. In the top class geography of Europe interested me. I found countries were inhabited by human beings, not names and statistics. We drew maps. The Head fetched utensils out of his house for us to sketch, and taught us lettering.

History came forward to the Nineteenth Century,

so we felt we were dealing with live people, not museum specimens. The Head brought his newspaper for us to read aloud, for which I thank him.

I found relief from the long languors of sitting still and listening by looking out of the windows. Sunshine across the great expanses of hillside, where gorse and bracken did their best to cover the grass from the nibbling sheep and donkeys, was a beautiful sight, especially of afternoons when the slanting rays turned golden.

Or a west wind bowed the few pines and ash and hawthorn trees; or mist rolled up in great billows, mysterious; or long sloping sweeps of rain fell from masses of dark cloud tumbling across the sky.

A fall of snow made the scene glitteringly picturesque, promising slides and snowballing and sledging. All the attractiveness of boyhood existence lay outside school.

A.R.W.

## Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

CHRISTIANITY AND MYTHOLOGY

SIR,—I must not trespass at any length on your valuable space, but Mr. Cutner's reply to me invites one or two comments. He asks, how many scholars attempted to deal with J. M. Robertson's case on broad and general lines? As it happens, I made the attempt myself in a little book entitled, *Rationalism and Historical Criticism*, and so far as I know, neither Mr. Robertson, nor any of his supporters has ever replied to it. I am glad to be reminded of Mr. Robertson's book, *Jesus and Judas*, as it is the only book of his on the subject which I have not examined. But if the quotation given by Mr. Cutner is typical, I fear it contains little that is new, and mis-statements and misunderstandings do not really gain in force by mere repetition.

It may interest Mr. Cutner to know that I have in manuscript a book on Mr. Robertson's main theses, but I doubt whether it is worth while to publish it now, for two main reasons. The theses themselves have very little scientific value, and Freethinkers are not genuinely in earnest in discussing them. J. M. Robertson admitted in discussion with me that he was quite unable to explain how a mythical Jesus-God ever came to be regarded as the Messiah. In addition, though he did not explicitly admit this, he was quite unable to explain how a drama based on human sacrifice came to be interpreted as the trial of a criminal before a Roman governor. An account of Christian origins which leaves unexplained, as J. M. Robertson's theses do, the simplest and most fundamental Christian convictions has obviously little or no scientific value.

I can assure Mr. Cutner that I have no fears for truth or Christianity, but his reply makes me more than ever solicitous for the welfare of Freethought. "It is not Freethought which cares very much one way or another on the matter." Quite so. Freethought is not concerned to discover the truth about the historicity of Jesus. It only wants a stick with which to beat orthodox Christianity, and one stick is as good as another. If this Christ-myth stick breaks in its hand, Freethought will find another. There have been Freethinkers who did care very much about truth, and I honour them. But modern Freethought seems to have lost its savour.

HERBERT G. WOOD.

## CHRISTIANITY AND WAR

SIR,—I hope you or one of your contributors will not overlook the following from the *Church Times*:—

Had the European nations cared for the Faith that is nominally theirs more than for political and economic advantage there would, for good or ill, have been a crusade against the Atheist rulers in the Kremlin 15 years ago.

A boycott failed to bring down the Soviet, and there was only a half-hearted war of intervention by Britain and France. The *Church Times* is saying that if the European nations had been sufficiently Christian they would have all declared war against Russia in 1920, and their armies invaded that country in order to suppress Atheism.

J. A. DAVIES.

## Society News

### LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S.

THE Eighth Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday, April 7, about two-thirds of the members being present. The President's report revealed a year's good work. Both in outdoor and indoor meetings, but the financial statement was not so pleasing. It showed the Branch considerably in debt, despite quite good sales of literature, and fairly good help from audiences. Ways and means of meeting this deficit were discussed, and it was decided to concentrate largely on reducing expenses and to make a strong drive for increased membership.

It was further agreed to increase the membership subscription for 1935-6 to six shillings. The following were elected as officers and committee for the ensuing year: President, J. V. Shortt; Vice-Presidents, W. McKelvie and D. Robinson; Committee, Mrs. P. Ready, Mrs. A. Shortt, C. Colman, C. J. Harrison, A. Jackson, H. Little, C. McKelvie, J. J. McManus, and W. Parry; Auditors, C. J. Harrison and H. Murphy; Conference Delegates, W. McKelvie, J. J. McManus, W. I. Owen and J. V. Shortt; Secretary, S. R. A. Ready, 29 Sycamore Road, Waterloo, Liverpool 22.—S.R.A.R.

### MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S.

At the Eighteenth Annual General Meeting, held April 13, the following were elected as Officers and Delegates for the ensuing year: President, Councillor George Hall; Secretary, Mr. Wm. Collins, 4 The Bungalows, Hayfield, Near Stockport; Lecture Secretary, Mr. B. Dunstan; Literature Secretary, Mr. C. McCall; Auditor, Mr. C. E. Turner; Committee: Messrs. H. I. Bayford, C. H. Black, W. Blaney, J. Freeman, R. MacQueen, F. E. Monks, S. Newton, and Mrs. McCall; Conference Delegates, Messrs. G. Hall and W. Collins; Delegates to Manchester and District Anti-War Council, Messrs. C. H. Black and W. Collins.

The Report and Balance Sheet were accepted, approval was given for the formation of local groups, and Conference arrangements were confirmed. Questions of future propaganda, both outdoor and indoor, and other matters were relegated to the new Committee.—W.C.

Hallowed is God's Christian name.

Moses gave the people the commandments when they wanted food. He was a good leader who went up into the mountains to be away from them.

The Prodigal Son soon had to come home because he spent his money on Charlotte.

The Ten Commandments have lasted to this day, but then they were written on great slabs of stone.

The Scotch do not belong to the Church of England. They go to the Free Church.

Faith is believing what is sure to be untrue when you find out.

A miracle is a thing no man can do except the person who does it.

Mormons were first called the Pilgrim Fathers, but they have given up several of their wives now.

Ambiguous means that you have two wives. It is sometimes called bigotry.

As well as church you can now be married in an off license.

From "Latest Howlers," by Cecil Hunt.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON

#### OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30; Mr. Ebury. Highbury Corner, 8.0, Mr. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.30, Sunday, Mr. E. Gee. 3.30, Messrs. Wood, Bryant, Gee and Tuson. *Freethinker* on sale outside Park Gates, and literature to order.

### COUNTRY

#### INDOOR

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Cobden Hall, Cort Street, Blackburn): 7.0, Members' Meeting. Followed at 8.0 by a Musical Programme. All welcome.

GILLBRIDGE AVENUE, 7.0 Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Did Christ Live and Die?"

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