

# THE FREETHINKER

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**Views and Opinions**

**Speech and Thought**

I TAKE it as all to the good that—as our letter-bag shows—so much interest has been taken in the notes recently published on the meaning of the word “religion.” For words are not dead things, but very living ones. There is not a word of any importance which has not a life of its own, which does not stretch back to a remote ancestry, carrying with it a number of connotations from which it is difficult and almost impossible to dissociate it. The only value in any word is that it has a number of associations, and so acts as an indication of things. Despite the old tag that language was given to man to conceal thought, the fact is that words were first hammered out to express thoughts; or, to put it more plainly, to express man’s thoughts about things. A child making a puffing noise to indicate a steam-engine is acting precisely as early man did to convey to others his experience of the world. Language, in short, is not something that came to man ready made—it is only in such books as the Bible that these things happen—it is something that has grown; its development is as much a subject of study as is the growth of the central nervous system, and just as a study of the animal body proves that its present structure is reminiscent of past life stages, so a study of words shows indications of forms of mental life that many of us to-day recognize as worn and undesirable. Language is a living thing in a world of living things, and just as the animal organism, if it is to live, must adapt itself to a changing environment, so we need constantly to adapt our language to the needs of a changing social environment and developing intellectual life.

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**Polarized Words**

Any and every department of life offers illustrations of the truth of what has been said. Such a word as “King” will serve as well as any. Often one hears the comment: “But if we did not have a King we should have a President, the King is but a President

under another name, and what does a name matter?” The two cases are not in the least parallel. A President is one who is placed where he is at the wish of his fellows. He is elected because his fellows—wisely or unwisely—believe him to be best fitted to the post. He may be removed without anyone being shocked or outraged, and the test of his fitness is avowedly the degree to which he ministers to the well-being of his countrymen. The origin of the Presidency is utility, and the standard by which it is judged is the same. But Kingship has a quite different origin, and appeals to quite another set of considerations. The King does not originate in social utility, but in downright superstition. The primitive King is the primitive priest or medicine-man. He is there in power because of his fancied connexion with the tribal gods and ghosts that are believed to preside over tribal destiny. And injury to him, or disloyalty to him, is treason to the tribe because it is believed it will stop the rain falling, or the crops growing, or will lead to some other social or cosmical disaster. And even when social and intellectual developments separate the functions of the King and the priest, we still have the “sacred” character of the Kingship retained. He must still be approached with something of the same ceremony and special obeisances with which the believer approaches his deity. The religious “though he slay me, yet will I trust him,” has its analogue in the conviction that personal loyalty is due to the King no matter what he is or what he does. All these things belong to the history of the word “King.” They are part of its unavoidable associations, and so long as we use the name, without being fully aware of its undesirable associations, so long are we apt to become the slave of a word instead of making the word our servant.

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**What is Religion?**

It was consideration of this kind that prompted our comments on the use of the word “religion” by those who call themselves “Freethinkers.” Wherever that word has been used it has universally been taken to imply a belief in gods, souls, in the sum total of established superstitions in any tribe or people. It has meant that also in general language. The expression “religious wars,” “religious belief,” “religious mania,” etc., never means, in the absence of elaborate and careful explanation, anything other than beliefs in supernatural powers. And this being so it is simply impossible for a Freethinker to take a word that is so definitely “polarized,” to use an expression of Wendell Holmes, and apply it in quite a new connexion without running the risk of both being misunderstood and of deceiving those who hear it. They who hear it used, do not accept it in the new meaning that has been manufactured for it, but in the old one and the proper one. If I go into a church and tell the congregation that I believe in religion, there may be some doubts as to whether I be-

lieve in the Jewish or the Christian or some other religion, but none there will doubt that I believe in some sort of a God, some sort of a soul, and some sort of a hereafter. There is not the slightest doubt as to that. And those who grasp at this word certainly pay religious people a "violent compliment" in so hanging on to the term. "You must have some sort of a religion," has been the orthodox contention. No man can be the best kind of husband, friend, or citizen, without a religion. And what is it but accepting this perfectly idiotic generalization, when one turns round and says: "Oh yes, I have a religion, but it is not yours"? Is it not infinitely better, infinitely more straightforward, and far better calculated to encourage independence of character and honesty of speech, if we meet the religious challenge plainly and bluntly and insist that love of home is not religion, love of family is not religion, love of country is not religion, love of the "true, the beautiful, the good," is not religion. These are social products, they spring from the life of humanity and have not the remotest connexion with any of the beliefs that from the earliest times have formed the core of the religions of the world.

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#### The Significance of Words

One of the most foolish of things is to deprecate a discussion because "it is only about words." As George Henry Lewes once asked, what should our disputes be about if they are not about words? In the world of thought words—real words—take the rank of things. And as thought hammers out words, so words in turn react on thought, and even coerce it. And for that reason, because there is so intimate a relation between language and thought, there are two things that are of primary importance. The first is to, so far as we can, use words that shall accurately express our meaning to ourselves. That will help to keep our own minds clear and prevent our falling victims to the thousand and one superstitions and false beliefs which surround us. And the second is to use words that will not mislead those who listen or who read. A Freethinker to a Freethinker might use such words as spiritual or religious without any great fear of misunderstanding. Both would recognize that the words were being used in a meaning out of the common, and thought would not be hampered or misled by it. But when a Freethinker uses such words to Christians, quite well aware that those to whom he speaks will understand them in a sense quite different from his own, he is coming about as near to deliberately misleading as it is possible for him to come. He is giving a surreptitious support to the very thing he proclaimed himself eager to destroy.

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#### Words and Things

The present position is a curious one. On the one side we have masses of people still giving credence to all sorts of superstitions from the belief in mascots to those operative in established forms of religion. And on the other side there are large numbers of others with sufficient keenness of mind to see the absurdity of religious beliefs, but give them a larger or smaller measure of support by their use of phrases which sanction the cruder forms of religions. In this way mental timidity finds refuge in an evasive phraseology, and popular superstition gathers strength from the assumed sanction of the better educated classes. A prominent scientist is reported as believing in a "God." It is true that the god believed in is nothing more than a mere abstraction, an assumed unknown quantity that does nothing whatever. But it is enough. It is used to strengthen the belief in another god who is not far removed from the Mumbo-Jumbo of an uncivilized African tribe. A prominent

politician professes admiration for "true Christianity." He does not stop to explain—it would hardly pay to do so—that what he means by true Christianity is admiration for the character of Jesus Christ as a mere man, a struggling social reformer, whose sole aim was the improvement in human life in this world. But, again, it is enough. He is claimed as a Christian, advertised as a Christian, used to support established Christianity in all its forms, and—most significant fact of all—without any sort of protest on the part of either scientist or politician, against being used to bolster up a system of thought of which he entirely disapproves. One suspects that had the same liberty been taken with these men's names with reference to an unpopular form of thought there would have followed a widely spread and well advertised repudiation. Against these evils the effective remedy is accuracy of speech. That will help each to see his thoughts clearly, and everyone is the better for that. I am not striving to make men slaves to phrases or servants to mere words. Words are of no value save so far as they express thought, but it is well they should express clear and strong thinking and not be used as a cover to encourage intellectual timidity or laziness. The reformer has always a hard task in fighting established ideas. These established ideas are incarnated in words and phrases which rouse a whole set of appropriate feelings whenever they are used. On the other hand the reformer is faced with the task of either establishing a new vocabulary or of getting new meanings attached to an old one. In either case the dice are loaded in favour of the orthodox and the conservative. These difficulties are inevitable and must be accepted as part of our task. But there is no reason why the difficulties should be made greater by those who should be our friends using words that play directly into the hands of our enemies.

(Reprinted.)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Straws and the Wind

"If I had been a bishop, with an income of five to ten thousand a year, I should have had an inexhaustible source of rejoicing and merriment in the generosity, if not in the credulity, of my countrymen."—John Bright.

THE modern Labour Movement has never proclaimed, and never sought after, an alliance with the clergy. So evident is this aloofness that, whenever a Trades Union Congress is held, the clergy are certain to break out into very hysterical appeals to Labour leaders to remember that the Christian God and the Churches have always been on their side. But, as an old proverb assures us, in vain is the net spread in full sight of the bird. The fundamental instinct of self-preservation prompts other and safer measures for Democracy than a close contact with the Black Army of Priestcraft.

This feeling of estrangement between the Labour Movement and Christian Orthodoxy is more marked on the part of the Church of England than on that of the numerous Free Church bodies. For that particular form of the Christian Church which is known as the Church of England has been manufactured by Parliament, and is therefore a creature subject to Parliament. From time to time it has even been under the hands of its creator for alterations and repairs. And it is by no means impossible that Parliament might decide, sooner or later, to disestablish and disendow this Church of England, and use its ill-gotten gains for far worthier purposes.

Despite their bold-as-brass front, the Anglican clergy realize this perfectly well, and they are now quietly endeavouring to rid themselves of Parlia-

mentary control, and to hold on to their wealth and properties without disgoring a penny or a brick. Their smart idea is for them to wriggle out of State Control, take their place as a perfectly private religious body, and thus escape the terrors of disgorging the accumulated wealth which they had acquired during their long periods of unquestioned power.

This is the real import of the just-published report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Relations between Church and State. The Commission which was set up by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York as long ago as 1930, owed its existence largely to the rejection by Parliament in 1927 and 1928 of the Revised Prayer Book, which the Anglo-Romish ecclesiastics wished to force upon their innocent Protestant followers. The question of Disestablishment, "as one of escape from the difficulties of the situation," is discussed in the report in a purely academic way, but, naturally, this drastic measure is not recommended "in the present circumstances." As for the far more momentous matter of disendowment, the clerical commissioners seem to say, with Prince Hamlet, "Come in any shape but that!"

The report also deals with the question of marriage. The State approves divorce, and this State-supported Church refuses to admit its validity. Here is a definite clash of opinion. The Bishop of London, whose evidence before the Commission is published frankly admits that he has broken the law on this matter for many years throughout the London diocese. Other matters of minor importance are dealt with in this momentous report, but the important thing to remember is that it is a definite move towards freeing this Church of England from the control of Parliament, and to allow this most wealthy Church in Christendom to retain its millions of money to perpetuate Medievalism in the Twentieth Century. There is no escape from the charge of Feudalism. The modern State upholds the equality of the sexes, this Church regards woman as the weaker vessel. The State upholds tolerance, this Church teaches intolerance. The Church's own articles settle the matter conclusively.

Every Church of England priest subscribes most solemnly to the out-of-date Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, and these articles make the most curious reading to-day, whatever they may have done in the days when people were illiterate and priests rode roughshod over their liberties. These articles include the quaint idea that "Adam" was the father of the human race, and that he committed an act of petty larceny, in consequence of which countless generations are damned to everlasting torture. They include the belief that a spirit can be at the same time a father and also a son, and, in addition, proceed from itself as a ghost. They include the idea that the monarch is the head of the Church of Christ. They include the belief that Jesus Christ went down bodily to "Hell." And so on, and so forth.

To these Articles of Faith sixteen thousand other-wise sane Church of England priests subscribe, of which no less than three hundred are bishops, who are not "reverend," but "right-reverend Fathers in God." And we know that great numbers of them do not believe in them, or observe them; that they are taking money on false pretences. And that their main reasons for remaining in the Church of England are "purple, palaces, patronage, profit, and power," as a former Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral wittily expressed it. And the right to appoint clergymen to benefices is sold for money in the open market, as if it were so much coal or a quack medicine. Parliament makes the religion, and the landlords appoint its professors, or barter the sacred appointment to the highest bidder. Is it not a holy profession?

Parliament actually makes this religion. The creator is a cynical association known as the House of Commons, having no religion in particular, and looking upon the theology which it patronizes as a special constable, whose duty it is to frighten people from attending too much to the real affairs of life by promising them gold crowns when they are no longer alive.

In the ranks of the clergy are a number who pretend that this Church of England represents a holy religion altogether independent of the House of Commons, or any other lay control. Most clergymen are notoriously ignorant of the culture of their own sorry profession, but the innocence is overdone when they see from time to time the ritual, Government, and doctrines of their Church being declared by Acts of Parliament, framed by Freethinkers, Roman Catholics, Free Churchmen, Jews, Parsees, Unitarians, and the religions and non-religions professed by the six hundred odd members of Parliament.

No reform of this Church of England is needed at all. It should be disestablished and disendowed, and then left to reform itself like any other society. Few worse misfortunes can befall a people than that of possessing a very wealthy and very powerful institution in its midst that saps the very springs of morality, that permits mental and moral confusion, and that always hinders the wheels of progress in the way that this Church of England does. Humility is a rare and a fragrant virtue, but decent citizens cannot forever surrender their undoubted rights at the behests of the clergy, however saintly. For it is obvious that men are ordained to the Christian ministry, who have never been converted to civilization.

MIMNERMUS.

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## The Use and Abuse of Benevolence

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LONG since De Foe asserted that almsgiving is no charity and many think that, if justice ruled the world, schemes of public and private benevolence would prove entirely unnecessary. Yet, the exercise of the sympathetic sentiments is sometimes salutary, and giver and recipient alike are in many instances the better for the gracious conduct of the more opulent members of the community. In any case, while we are awaiting the advent of the long delayed social millenium, with the fulfilment of its promise of a more equitable distribution of the national income, charitable societies and other benevolent bodies seem likely to survive.

The tumult that preceded the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832, the rick burnings, toll-gate riots, the machine breaking activities of the Luddites, and other turbulent events caused great uneasiness among the well-to-do classes in England. For there existed a very small military force, the Police were yet to come, and only a few decades had passed since London, during the No Popery agitation—the Gordon Riots of 1780—was for a time at the entire mercy of the mob.

In the earlier nineteenth century the upper classes were sternly reprobated as the callous oppressors of the poor. The reply was made that English statesmanship had saved the country from the tyranny and rapacity of Napoleon. Moreover, if conclusive evidence of the humanity of the governing order were in request, let the public look at the imposing list of charities which had grown so greatly during the past century. Let them remember the loan funds and benevolent societies, hospitals and

dispensaries, penitentiaries and reformatories, as well as schools, all established and endowed by private benefactors, and then admit the injustice of their accusation.

The increase in charitable institutions in London between 1800 and 1860 is shown in Sampson Low's summary, from which we learn that: "Out of 640 institutions, 270 were founded between 1800 and 1850, and 144 between 1850 and 1860," while the incomes of these voluntary societies exceeded the sum supplied by the taxpayer in relief of the poor and distressed.

Then there were various societies for orphans or for children found wandering at large, but many orphans were uncared for, while other children preferred their liberty to any form of restraint. Also many facilities were afforded to girls and women who had fallen, or strayed near "the brink of sin." Homes for penitents were numerous and Mr. E. Lascelles, in his discriminating essay *Charity*, notes that: "Many of them would have opened their doors to Sikes's Nancy and her friend Bet, but here again it is doubtful whether the invitation would have been accepted until other means of living had failed, for the references to 'much wholesome discipline,' 'productive industry of the inmates in washing and needlework,' and 'inmates trained to the habits of industry, laundry work forming their chief occupation,' must have sounded ominous to the prospective penitents."

Associations for helping dressmakers and milliners and homes for training girls in domestic drudgery also existed. "Indeed," comments Lascelles, "if all the philanthropic bodies which offered training or encouragement to future domestic servants were successful in their objects, the supply and quality of domestic servants must have reached their highest point during the nineteenth century."

There were shelters for the homeless and destitute, but these were only available in harsh winter weather and places were set apart for the lower orders to wash and bathe in. Funds for workless labourers were administered by City Companies and the Police Court poor-boxes helped to relieve a modicum of distress when times were unusually hard. But the greatest assistance seems to have been rendered by the Societies that sent district visitors to "the deserving poor" in their own dwellings. One City Association "supplied fuel at 4d. a cwt. to thousands of families during severe weather."

Almshouses were numerous, but conditions of admission were often sadly restricted by residential qualifications, character or profession. In the St. Pancras almshouses admission was reserved to those who had paid poor rates in that parish for at least ten years, whose character was beyond reproach. Moreover, candidates must never have received poor relief and be upwards of sixty years of age. At Whittington's Highgate almshouses the obligations of applicants were less severe, but other institutions were open to very few, and vacancies seldom occurred.

With pensions it was much the same. The National Benevolent Institution provided pensions for upper and middle class people in reduced circumstances, to the exclusion of every one else, and other Societies pursued a similar policy. One Society confined its benefactions to the widows and spinster daughters of those who had "moved in superior stations in society," while some went so far as to restrict pensions to those who had formerly subscribed to the Societies' funds.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital dates back to 1123, and is the earliest of our great temples of healing. Guy's was founded in the opening eighteenth century, when several others arose, but the prevalence

of typhus in the middle century, then called Hospital fever, brought hospitals into temporary disfavour. But in the nineteenth century progress was resumed and voluntary hospitals greatly increased in number. Admission was usually obtained by means of letters of recommendation from subscribers, but the treatment seems to have been primitive when compared with present-day procedure.

City Companies controlled many charities. The Drapers' Company were trustees for various bequests, while the Mercers' controlled numerous charities. These last included such foundations as St. Paul's School, the Mercers' Schools, the Gresham Trusts, the Trinity Hospital at Greenwich, while other duties were the provision of coal for the poor, the loaning of money free of interest to young beginners, the relief of poor prisoners and the supply of clothing to the destitute. But the Mercers' Company did not escape censure, and a critic expressed the hope that funds under the Company's control had not been "wasted in sumptuous Pitt dinners, in ostentatious entertainments to members of the Holy Alliance, nor in magnificent embellishments to their halls making them more like palaces than buildings appropriate to the occasional meetings of industrious tradesmen."

Complaints of the squandering of funds intended by benefactors for the needy and oppressed were frequent. Surplus revenue was quite commonly devoted to luxurious feasting, and it is stated that "the Apposition Dinner of St. Paul's for £229, or Quarterly dinners for the governors of St. Olave's free grammar school were not unusual, and gave rise to the sarcastic comment that the 'opprobrium of gluttony which attaches to the national character has chiefly arisen from foreigners observing the periodical feasting which take place through the country, out of the funds left for pious and charitable uses.'" Moreover, we must remember that the sums expended possessed far greater purchasing power than present-day currency.

Misappropriation of this character was widespread, so much so, that Lord Lyndhurst speaking at the time of the introduction of the Charitable Trusts Bill in 1846, seized the occasion to describe a scandalous instance of maladministration. The act of wanton extravagance to which Lyndhurst referred was committed by members of the Mercers' Company, and well might his lordship say that his auditors would recollect "that this is the Mercers' Company which claims to be exempted from the operations of the Bill on account of the strict and faithful manner in which they have hitherto discharged their duties—and are likely to discharge them again."

District visiting was a leading feature of charity administration, and Dr. Chalmers was an earnest advocate of this system. But he was the sworn enemy of the Poor Law, and he contended that "the virtue of humanity ought never to have been legalized, but left to the spontaneous working of man's own willing and compassionate nature." He asserted that ill-conceived legislation had provided means of relief to good, bad and indifferent alike, and then to evade "the ruinous consequences of the law, the relief was made as degrading as possible." On the whole, the visiting system worked out fairly well and penury and suffering were considerably alleviated, while the stigma which always attaches to parish relief was largely avoided.

Brougham's Commission of Inquiry pursued its labours from 1818 to 1837, and many flagrant abuses of trust funds, both in London and the Provinces, were revealed. The 38 volumes of reports contained instances of funds that had vanished; charity incomes used by Corporations for their own benefit, and many cases of misapplied money. For example: "In one

of the Bristol parishes it was found that part of a bread fund had been misapplied for several years, and the amount owing to the Charity was £3,891. A charitable fund at Preston had disappeared, and it was doubtful if any part of it could be recovered. A school in Westmoreland had been turned into a carpet factory by one of the trustees; . . . and a successor of the trustee had sold part of the estate as his own property." The majority of Charities seem, however, to have been better administered, but there were so many examples of evil doing that several successive Governments vainly endeavoured to obtain powers of supervision. Opposition to State control in any form was extremely powerful and persistent. The City Companies and many influential lawyers protested, and the Church was strongly opposed. The then Bishop of London declared that "no provision ought to be agreed to which would interfere with the influence which the Church had over Charities established for educational or Church purposes."

After ten Bills had been before Parliament, a meagre measure was placed on the Statute Books, which led to the appointment of the Charity Commission in 1853, but another Act was found necessary in 1860 to strengthen its provisions. Naturally enough, endowed charities sank deeply in public estimation from the innumerable instances of fraud and malfeasance that inquiry had disclosed.

T. F. PALMER.

### Some Martyrs of Edessa

IN *The Martyrdom of Barsamya* as in *The Acts of Sharbil*, the year A.G. 416 is falsely equated with the fifteenth year of Trajan's reign, the former being the same as A.D. 105, and the latter coinciding with A.D. 112; but in Barsamya's case a further mistake is made by putting the fifteenth year of Trajan's reign in the consulate of Commodus and Cyrillius, for in A.D. 112 the consuls were Trajan himself, and T. Sextius Africanus,<sup>25</sup> whilst A.D. 106 was the year when Commodus and Cerialis were in office.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, we are told that the tormentation of Barsamya was abandoned because an edict made by "the emperors" on behalf of the Christians, and circulated through the proconsuls arrived at Edessa. This edict purports to rescind another previously set forth by the same "emperors"<sup>27</sup> against the Christians. But except here and in the corresponding *Acts of Sharbil*, Trajan, who is intended as the author of the two edicts is nowhere said to have made an edict of any kind increasing the danger incurred by the Christians from their profession; whilst the only edict in their favour attributed to him is contained in his Rescript to Pliny which I have previously mentioned. This was referred to by Tertullian at the beginning of the third century in his *Apology* for the Christians.<sup>28</sup> He thinks that Trajan did them a service in exempting them from being searched for, but he regards it as very inconsistent not to seek out people who, if discovered, are liable to punishment. The edict which *The Martyrdom of Barsamya* describes is infinitely more favourable in its provisions than is Trajan's authentic Rescript. If Tertullian had heard of it he

would have adduced it in triumph, for he tries unscrupulously to show that the nobler Emperors all shielded Christianity. The edict itself bears every mark of being a forgery imitated from forged documents of the same kind set forth in the names of Titus Antoninus and Marcus Antoninus by industrious supporters of the Christian Faith. It is also quite incongruous with the matter which determined the legal proceedings of the Roman authorities against the Christians. This was the refusal of the Christians to pay the national deities religious honours, although these honours were enjoyed by the emperors. Thus it was not the omission of religious observances, but the act of civil disobedience which constituted the offence. Hence, supposing that the Christians were no more, or even less frequently guilty than their fellow citizens with respect to the crimes of theft and murder, their good conduct in these points would not exempt them from punishment for their misbehaviour in the point concerning which they were indicted. The fact is that the fabricator of this spurious edict desired to accomplish two things. Firstly, he wished to make it appear that upon a searching inquiry the Christians had been found innocent of certain moral offences wherewith they were often charged in widely different places; and secondly, that because of their general good conduct they were exempted from performing the religious rites incumbent upon all other subjects of the Roman Empire.

The account says that the letters which brought deliverance to Barsamya came from "Alusis [Lusius] the chief Proconsul, father of Emperors." This passage is enough to discredit any document. Cureton was no doubt right in taking the Alusis, whom it mentions for Q. Lusius Quietus who, as I remarked was the best of Trajan's generals. The title "Chief Proconsul" is anomalous, as there was only one proconsul to a province, and no proconsul over the proconsuls; besides which Lusius never was a proconsul of any kind. The designation "father of Emperors" is a piece of fustian, for Lusius never begat any Emperor. The career of Lusius as sketched by Tillemont from notices made by Dio (Bs. 68, 69) is as follows: Lusius, a Moorish chieftain, independent of the Romans, entered the Roman cavalry, and therein served with great distinction in Dacia and Mesopotamia. Afterwards, he destroyed Edessa and reduced other cities which like it had turned against the Romans. This was in A.D. 116, and in the same year he quelled a revolt of the Jews. For these services he got a consulate, followed by the procuratorship of Palestine. But in A.D. 117, upon the death of Trajan, he was regarded with suspicion by Hadrian, Trajan's successor, who deprived him of his Moorish troops, and two years later had him executed.<sup>29</sup> The above sketch shows how false is the statement that in A.D. 112 Lusius was a proconsul and forwarded to Edessa from his master Trajan an edict granting liberty to the Christians.

What I said about the two notaries who are introduced as attesting the *Acts of Sharbil* is equally true of the two who are introduced as attesting the *Martyrdom of Barsamya*. No respectable member of the legal profession would ever have attested the words because of their gross inaccuracy; and it was certainly not compatible with the interest of a dishonest lawyer to attest writings which his fellow-citizens know from experience to be full of false statements. Upon the

<sup>25</sup> Liebenham, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> The term "emperors" instead of "emperor" occurs no less than fifteen times in the work.

<sup>28</sup> *Q. Sept. Flor. Tertulliani Opera . . . Curanti E. F. Leo-hold. . . Lipsie 1839. Apologeticus Adversus Gentes Pro Christianis, Caps 2 and 5.*

<sup>29</sup> *Empereurs*, II., pp. 172, 193, 195, 203-195, 284, 206-229 and 234. The consulate of Lusius must have been a substitutionary one, for Tillemont in his *Chronologie* does not mention him among the regular consuls of Trajan's reign; whilst Liebenham does not credit him with any consulate. Smith, however, after saying that Lusius was made governor of Palestine, adds that he received a consulate in A.D. 116 or 117. (*Dic.* p. 637).

other hand, the forger of a narrative purporting to be a contemporary record of a distant event, might, through ignorance, make various mistakes concerning the historical circumstances of the alleged occurrence; and might also name fictitious notaries as vouchers for the truth of the narrative at the date falsely assigned by himself to its appearance.

As regards the supplementary part of the present document which may have been added thereunto at a later period, the following points deserve attention. The statement that Barsamya lived under Fabianus occurs in the concluding passage of these *Acts* as it occurs in that of the preceding *Acts*. In both works Barsamya is represented as being still alive in the fifteenth year of Trajan's reign, i.e., A.D. 112, whereas the period A.D. 236-250 was the time when Fabianus held the papacy. Moreover, the final passage in the Barsamya record like the penultimate one in the *Doctrine of Addæus* says that Palut received ordination to the episcopal office from Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, who had received it from Zephyrinus, Bishop of Rome, which is a two-fold mistake, as I pointed out in the section upon Aggæus.

As regards the reference to Tiberius the true reading, says Cureton, is probably not "nineteenth" but "sixteenth." This, according to him, agrees very approximately with A.G. 341 and with the consular year of Rubellius Geminus and Rufius Geminus,<sup>30</sup> which he does not specify, but which is definitely assigned to A.D. 20 by Liebenham, a later authority.<sup>31</sup> Cureton adds that Tertullian (*Adv. Jud.* 8) and Augustine (*De Civ.* xviii. 58) declare that the Crucifixion took place under the aforesaid consuls.<sup>32</sup> As A.G. 341 equals A.D. 30, and the sixteenth year of Tiberius was A.D. 30, the present equation fails only in the consular date.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be continued)

### A Zoo Tiger

I SEE him pining in an Iron Cage,  
His eyes so full of sadness and despair;  
No reconciliation to his lot is there,  
Nor any hope that might his gloom assuage.

From greenwood shades he came, full grown, to pass  
Remaining years, a captive in this land;  
(A humanitarian age made this demand)  
Yet hearts can break in feline of his class.

Mayhap in night-time he will find relax,  
In dreams too vivid of his former state,  
In that bright time when life was all elate,  
Ere he was holden on a day when lax.

His doom is sealed, no more to roam the Plain,  
His native haunts will see him nevermore,  
In iron cage pent up till life is o'er,  
Tis martyrdom and on the age a stain.

J. MACKINNON.

Tolerance in religion, it is well known, so unanimously admitted (at least verbally) even by the theologians of the nineteenth century, was seldom considered as practicable! Much less as a matter of right during the period of the Reformation.—Hallam.

<sup>30</sup> p. 187.

<sup>31</sup> p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> p. 187.

### Acid Drops

Professor Wheeler Robinson, D.D., tells an unctuous story about a Matabele Chief, Kumale, who describes his visit to England—no doubt under the lead of religious guides. Kumale was duly impressed and made all the appropriate remarks, interspersed with ejaculations like "O White Man," but towards the end of his wonder and awe, Mr. Kumale asked "why, with so many wonders, have you not yet conquered death?" Dr. Robinson's obviously untruthful answer must have destroyed all confidence that the Matabele chief had been invited here to confirm. "The proud Christian reply," says the Rev. Principal, was "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Proud, no doubt, but nobody, black or white, should try to deceive by insinuating that Christians never die.

Some of the letters published in our religious papers often give the game away in a manner not at all suspected by the writers. For example, one of them, "Single-handed," says that "many country churches are practically closed except for an afternoon or evening service conducted by a layman. Incumbents are known to go away for weeks, and leave no one in charge. . . . Is it any wonder if the Church should fall behind or lose its premier position?" We have an idea that the Church has already lost its "premier position." In any case, one can see that if such a religious stronghold as the "country" is finding it difficult to keep churches going "except for an afternoon or evening service" conducted by a layman, the Church must be in a pretty bad way, worse than its apologists in our national press would claim, and far worse than a B.B.C. preacher would admit. And what is being done about it? Would the Church dare to answer?

In the Report of the Joint Committee of Convocations on Marriage, it "re-affirms the principle, always held by the Church of England in common with the rest of the Western Church, that marriage is 'a life-long and indissoluble union.'" We quite agree that the Church, as a Church, had to re-affirm this; otherwise it would have had to throw overboard Jesus Christ on the subject. But the Report goes on to say that "it is not strictly accurate to say that divorce is *wrong*; the correct way is to say it is *impossible*." Well, whether it is impossible or not in the eyes of the Church, does not seem to matter much in the eyes of crowds of church people who want to be divorced. Overboard goes the Church—and Jesus—and recourse is had to the law of the land. More people than ever are being divorced, Church or no Church.

This does not mean to say that we Freethinkers are in favour of divorce at any time or for any reason. Marriage is a contract between two people with love as the principal bond. If that love goes and the parties concerned get to hate each other, why should they be compelled to live with one another because of the "Church," or because of what a celibate like Jesus—if he ever lived—is supposed to have said about marriage nearly two thousand years ago? Of what earthly value is his opinion these days on almost anything? If the Church wishes to keep marriage as always indissoluble, if a man or woman married to a maniac, a murderer, or a drunkard has to surrender his or her life's happiness to the Church's dictum that is a question to be decided by themselves. But the rational decision should be the secular one; that is, as this is the only life we know anything about, men and women should make the best of it; and if in particular instances they cannot live with one another, the law of the land should make them free. The Church is simply a silly anachronism.

A Church critic on Dibelius's *Gospel Criticism and Christology* says that this book "emphasizes the strongly theological basis of present-day thought. The search for a 'historical Jesus' stripped of all super-Victorian elements has been abandoned as a vain delusion. It is conceded that all four Gospels aim at setting forth a divine Saviour." We have been saying this for

years in these columns. The Gospel Jesus is not a man at all, and never was meant to be a man. He is a God, and if the word "divine" can make him more of a God, then he is a Divine God. Any other interpretation is simply nonsense.

The afore-mentioned critic says that "the people for whom the Gospels were composed did not ask to be told about a pious Jesus, or a patient, valiant, or truly human Jesus, but about the revelation of God in Jesus." Of course; Jesus was God revealed. He was Jehovah or whatever name may be given to God. The reverent "Rationalist" or "Agnostic" who goes about insisting that Jesus was a "good man," simply does not understand the Gospel or its problems. A "good man" would never have brought about Christianity or the devotion and adoration of Christians. It is Jesus the God who has inspired the Faith, and we are glad to see that is more and more emphasized by apologists. It simplifies our problems; for obviously if gods do not exist then Christianity is a vain delusion.

We have not read Canon Lindsay Dewar's pious book called: *Does God Care?* We suppose the answer is that he does! Are we not told that he looks after every individual hair of every Christian's head, and spends whatever time He has left in compiling statistics about the sufferings of sparrows?

"He Who came, comes," says Dr. Morgan Campbell. Alas for the facts which are so deadly opposed to Dr. Campbell's dictum. There is no evidence whatever that Christ ever came, but there is positive evidence that He Cometh Not. Christ predicted His own Coming, according to the fables of scripture. Even the Christian—credulous as he is—admits that Christ has not kept His word—His "generation" passed away and "these things" were not "fulfilled." Dr. Morgan had better forget it. What about Man and HIS welfare?

The Christian mind seems unhappy unless wallowing in pessimism about the wickedness of mankind. It is time somebody told those wet blankets to wake up. The Rev. John Bevan confesses, "I am in despair"—about what do you think? It is the horrible fact that some people still take a glass of beer when they want it. Another reverend writer in the *Christian World* weeps because even the B.B.C. does not occupy its "Children's Hour" with what this Jeremiah calls "condemnation of this frightful scourge." To read these and similar Christian protests one would imagine that drunkenness caused war, unemployment, and destitution. One of the most acute and chronic causes of these things is the fact that so many multitudes have their attention diverted into these puritanical channels while the real evils flourish unattacked by churches.

Religious teachers are never so comical as when they endeavour to explain exactly how, when and where God directs the individual man. All Christians believe that God is their Guide. No two Christians agree about the extent and scope of this "Divine Guidance." The Rev. John Pitts, M.A., Ph.D., states dogmatically, that "God Does Guide Us." He knows beyond a shadow of a peradventure that God intervened on two occasions. One is a Bible story. The other is of a man who wanted to be a soldier ("to follow the family tradition"), and became a clergyman instead. As Mr. Pitts puts it: "the British Army lost a dashing subaltern and the Church won one of its finest captains." But perhaps the army won too! And Mr. Pitts cannot rely on divine guidance generally, as he wisely says the average believer "must size up the situation which confronts him, and seek the counsel of those upon whose judgment he feels he can rely." The Atheist could scarcely say more or fairer than that.

The Rev. Cecil Northcott, M.A., in his article in the *Christian World* recently, is conscious of the lack of touch between the Churches and the problems in which people are interested to-day. He finds what he calls "a new seriousness," even in Christian congregations, as they gaze astonished at the barrenness of their creed. They see that "the whole organism of modern industry,

for instance, seems to be allied with Christianity, both historically and in its views of employer and employed. Family life and sex have had a certain mould placed on them which is being questioned in this new reformation, so much so that a Christian theology which does not have something to say about them will be dismissed." We sympathize with Mr. Northcott's evident sincerity, but Christian theology has already said its say, and it is because its "message" has proved worthless that even "congregations" have ceased to heed it in all practical matters of life to-day.

The Archbishop of York's tour in the United States recently gave rise to "reactions" among a large number of American citizens who heard him; and some of these are enumerated by the correspondent of the *Church Times*. It seems that Dr. Temple "carefully refrained from advising Americans about their foreign policy; that he did not regard Holy Orders as a sacrament, but as a device for securing reasonable regularity in the exercise of the ministry; that he showed little or no appreciation of Catholicism, Roman or Anglican; that he had a willingness to see nothing but good in American Protestantism; that he spoke mostly in vague or general terms; and more often than not, he seemed to be talking down to his audiences." If this is all true, it would prove interesting to know how much Christianity has been helped or furthered by Dr. Temple's tour? How many converts have been made by the "vague and general terms?" And whether this kind of lecture does not prove how bankrupt Christianity really is of both reforms, ideas and progress?

A meeting arranged by the Council for Promoting Catholic Unity took place the other day. The leading motif is "the sole purpose of the amendment of the schism of the sixteenth century by the reconciliation of the Anglican Communion with the Holy See on the basis of true dogmatic agreement." The speakers were entirely in favour of the English Church going bodily over to Rome—though "joining the Society would not commit any one to Benediction or the Latin Mass. They would be committed to holding that the Holy Father was the divinely appointed centre of the Catholic Church." But why do these people not go over themselves first and work for the complete conversion of England afterwards? They at least would be safe in heaven. One speaker said "the Church must unite or it will perish." We agree partly. What we say is that the Church will perish, singly or united. Worn out creeds must die.

For intents and purposes we might as well scrap the Bible, and accept something absolutely contradictory to all its teaching, if we listen to what the clergy tell us about the Bible. Dr. James Reid, D.D., says that Christ "did not suggest that man should lie back and dream and expect God to provide." Dr. Reid invents the lying-back and the dreaming which Christ neither "suggested" nor said. But Christ did most emphatically and definitely state (not "suggest") "Ask and it shall be given you" (Matt. vii. 7), "Ask what ye will and it shall be done" (John xv. 7), and let us add, for Dr. Reid's information, that Christians kneel and pray and believe these absurd "promises" which apparently Dr. Reid has not the courage to repudiate, but only to misquote.

The Twelve Disciples were a queer lot. Peter the "denier," Thomas the "doubter," Judas the "betrayed," most of them deserters who "forsook Him and fled." And now Prof. Findlay describes Philip as "a bustling kind of person 'getting on the nerves'" of his friends. But surely the Professor cannot mean that Philip was any sort of a hustler as a disciple. Actually his bosom-friend Nathaniel, living on the very spot had never heard of Jesus, and was perfectly certain that no good at all had ever come out of Nazareth, in his very own neighbourhood. There was not even a rumour about a star, a supernatural birth, or an incarnated God living and now teaching in the very midst of Nathaniel's locality.



N.S.S. ANNUAL DINNER, HOLBORN RESTAURANT, January 25, 1936.

Photo by Swaine.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE,

EDITORIAL

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Will correspondents please note that all letters intended for Mr. Cohen himself must be marked "Personal." Only urgent business will be dealt with.

T. M. MOSLEY, E. TRASK, J. DAVIDSON, H. BUCK, R. H. SALKELD, M. BARBANELL.—Many thanks for sending on Massey's *Historical Jesus*.

FOR Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—W. Don Fisher, 3s.; Vivian Phelps, 3s.

W. WRIGHT AND J. HUTCHINSON.—Thanks for offer, but not now necessary.

W. W. ROOME.—Many thanks for subscription of New Subscriber, paper being sent.

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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.

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

## Sugar Plums

We regret to announce that at present Mr. Cohen is unable to do any work at all. If he progresses as favourably as at present is the case, he will be able, in about two or three weeks, to resume the editorial chair. Meanwhile we hope that our readers, will please remember that in a paper such as the *Freethinker*, they have their share to do as well as the writers.

A column and very flattering notice of *Humanity and War* appears in the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*. We hope it will stimulate sales in that quarter. The pamphlet is selling very well indeed, and its wide circulation has brought us into touch with many new friends.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti is hoping to meet old and new friends to-day (February 9), when he speaks for the West Ham Branch on "Jesus, Fascism, and Freethought," in the Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10. Leyton is new territory for the West Ham Branch, and with some more local support should provide good results. Members have been enrolled from the new ground, and there is plenty of work for many more.

The West London Branch N.S.S. continues to grow in membership and activity, and has quite a healthy balance sheet. The Annual General Meeting is fixed for Monday, February 10, at the Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, at 8 p.m. After the despatch of business the remainder of the evening will be devoted to a concert. Naturally all members of the Branch are expected to attend the full proceedings.

The Merseyside Freethinkers will be holding their Fourth Annual Dinner, on Saturday, February 15, at the Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool, within easy reach from all stations, buses and trams. Reception 6.30, Dinner 7.0 p.m. Usual short speeches and an entertainment programme. Tickets 5s. 6d. each, 10s. double (lady and gentleman) can be obtained from Mr. S. R. A. Ready, 34 Lancaster Avenue, Great Crosby, Liverpool 23.

The debate which had been arranged between Mr. C. Tuson of the West London Branch N.S.S. and Mr. Winckworth of the Church Union, Seven Years Association, in Fulham Town Hall for February 20, has been cancelled by Mr. Winckworth, on the grounds that no useful purpose would be served by holding the debate. As the debate was the outcome of Mr. Winckworth's distortion of Atheism during a recent lecture on that subject, we can well understand why a discussion with a real Atheist in public would not be very useful to him. If his withdrawal from the debate will also involve a more truthful handling of Atheism in the future on the part of Mr. Winckworth, then Mr. Tuson's action in the original challenge will have achieved its object.

Here is a chance for a brilliant writer on the Truth of the Christian Religion to make a "pile" if he can prove it. It seems that a "Foundation" was planned, some years ago in America, by a Mr. William Bross, that "for the best book or Manuscript, hitherto unpublished, on the connexion, relation, and mutual bearing of the Humanities, the Social Sciences, the Physical Sciences, the Biological Sciences, or any branch of knowledge, with and upon the Christian religion, the trustees will award a cash prize of 15,000 dollars on or after January 1, 1940." What a magnificent chance for some of our Catholic converts to prove to the world that the original tree of Christianity, Roman Catholicism, can easily "demonstrate the divine origin and the authority of the Christian Scriptures," as Mr. Bross wants. Also, "to show how both science and revelation coincide and prove the existence, the providence or any or all of the attributes of the only living and true God."

Not so many years ago there might have been some solid attempts on the part of a few of the scholars in the Church of England. We say "attempts" for, of course, they would have to be most liberally seasoned with "faith." Still, some books could have been written then which might have stood a chance of winning the prize. Nowadays, however, except to the narrow circle of the truly pious, what chance would any work have of proving the "divine origin and authority of the Christian Scriptures"? or how science and revelation "coincide" to prove the "existence and attributes of the only living and true God"?

How can any man of science *prove* these things to anybody of ordinary intellectual attainments? The idea is fantastic. Perhaps—as has been suggested by the correspondent who sent us the particulars of the competition—the offer may be "summarized as a handsome bribe to scientists to prove what they do not believe." We agree.

The mental attitude of these priest-dominated ancestors of ours is amazing. They were like children in the hands of unscrupulous teachers. In reading these old chronicles (the Bible) it is impossible not to be shocked by the incongruity ever arising out of the juxtaposition of theory and practice.—*Jewelyn Powys*.

## Things Worth Knowing\*

### XXVII.

#### KINGS AND GODS IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

THE idea that the King was simply the strongest and bravest man of the tribe is utterly false. Like most purely rationalistic speculations concerning the origin of society, it takes no account of the fact that primitive men are devoid of any conception of an essential rational order, and hence are subject to superstition, a force which exerts an immense influence on the development of social organization.

In the early stages of society, men who are ignorant of the processes of nature arrogate to themselves functions of a superhuman or divine character. The order and uniformity of nature, recurring events in the physical world, such as the cycle of the seasons, impress the primitive intelligence and delude man into the belief that he can affect them. He foresees them, and mistakes their recurrence, if desired, for an effect of his own will; while any departure from the regular order, if dreaded, is ascribed to an effect of his enemy's will. He fancies that the forces of nature are within reach of his power, and that he can touch them and work good for himself and evil for his foes.

Thus arose magicians and medicine-men. They are the most ancient professional class of which we have any knowledge, and sorcerers are found in every savage tribe of which there is any record. In the course of time men become differentiated into more specialized classes, such as the healers of disease, the makers of rain and so forth; while the most powerful member of the order wins for himself the position of chief and gradually develops into a sacred king. His old magical functions fall more and more into the background, and are replaced by priestly and even divine duties as magic is slowly ousted by religion. So long as men regard their gods as being akin to themselves and raised to an unapproachable height, they conceive it to be possible for outstanding members of the community to attain divine rank after death. Not only does the King possess divine powers, but he is very often regarded as a veritable God.

Human gods have been found all over the world. The King of Sofala, a French missionary observed in 1843, is a woolly-headed Kaffir, a heathen who . . . esteems himself a god of all his lands, and is so looked upon and revered by his subjects. . . . The Peruvians formerly believed that their Inca was descended from the Sun, whence he united within himself the civil and religious power, and was regarded as perfect. . . . The laws of Manu lay it down that the King is created by eternal particles of Indra, of the wind, of Yama, of the sun, of fire, of Varuna, of the moon, and of the Lord of Wealth. . . . In Japan the Mikado is regarded as a divine and mysterious personage descended from the sun-goddess Amatarasu Omikami. . . . In a recent treatise on the Japanese constitution (1930) the learned Dean of Nihon University informs us that the Imperial line is eternal, co-eval with heaven and earth. . . . We keep the name of the Emperor sacred and do not mention it in ordinary conversation. . . . No Japanese dare doubt the divine origin of the Mighty Ruler. He is in our eyes

\* Under this heading we purpose printing, weekly, a series of definite statements, taken from authoritative works, on specific subjects. They will supply instructive comments on aspects of special subjects, and will be useful, not merely in themselves, but also as a guide to works that are worth closer study.

the Son of Heaven. He is in our politics utterly sacred. . . .

The most thorough-going manifestations of human godhead were those which existed amongst the ancient Egyptians. In the course of his existence the King of Egypt exhausted all the possible conceptions of divinity which the Egyptians had formulated for themselves. A superhuman god by his birth and his royal office, he became the deified man after his death. Thus all that was known of the divine was summed up in him. . . . The ancient Kings of Greece and Rome were priests. . . . The Kings of Sparta, we learn from Aristotle, had three attributes; they performed the sacrifices, commanded in war, and administered justice. Homer and Virgil depict the Kings as continually engaged in sacred ceremonies, and we know from Demosthenes that the ancient Kings of Attica performed in person all the sacrifices required by the religion of the city. An ancient King of Sicyon was deposed, because having soiled his hands with a murder he was no longer in a condition to offer the sacrifices. Having become unfit to be a priest, he could no longer remain a King. . . . Tradition represents all the Roman Kings as priests.

Belief in the godlike character of princes and rulers prevailed in Europe until modern times. The Kings of England and France exercised miraculous powers of healing from the fifth century onwards. They were able to do this because they had for long been regarded as sacred persons. Their dynasties were descended from the ancient Germans, who considered Kings to be of divine origin, and hence endowed with special powers over nature with regard to such matters as harvests.

With the spread of Christianity, the temporal ruler ceased officially to be a divine person, although a belief in his sacred attributes no doubt lingered in the minds of the people for centuries. But the sacred quality of the King was soon re-established in a new form by means of the religious ceremony of consecration, and in particular through the essential rite of anointing. . . . In 1626, the Bishop of Chartres drew up a State paper, afterwards ratified by the Parliament in Paris, which declared that "the Kings are gods, not by nature, but through grace. . . . Blind obedience is a holy duty. . . ." The touching of persons to cure them of scrofula, performed by the Kings of England until comparatively recent times, clearly reveals the modern sovereign as the successor to the ancient medicine-man or magician. Pepys saw the King "heale" on April 13, 1661, and Dr. Johnson was touched by Queen Anne when he was a child. There was even a curious revival in France in 1825 under Charles X. The process of deifying human beings could actually be witnessed in India so late as the second half of the nineteenth century. "Not long ago," wrote Iyall in 1872, "the Bunjaras turned General Nicholson into a new god, to be added to the many at whose tombs sacrifice and worship were regularly offered."

*Civilization and the Growth of Law* (1935)  
by W. A. ROBSON, pp. 16-24.

A total disbelief of apparitions is adverse to the opinion of the existence of the soul between death and the last day. The question is simply whether departed spirits ever have the power of making themselves perceptible to us; a man who thinks he has seen an apparition can only be convinced himself; his authority will not convince another; and his conviction, if rational, must be founded on being told something which cannot be known except by supernatural means.

Samuel Johnson.

## East and West

SOME months ago, in these columns, the present writer (in a vein of irony as he supposed) suggested that for religionists the reunion of Christendom alone was not the *summum bonum* to which they should aspire; but the amalgamation of ALL faiths throughout the whole world. But he certainly rubbed his eyes when he read in a morning paper of December 30, that on the previous day (a Sunday) the Koran and the sacred books of the Hindus and Buddhists, as well as the Christians' Bible, were read in Trinity Congregational Church, Glasgow. The Rev. H. S. McClelland, the minister of the church, described the new service as an effort to help to break down the needless barriers dividing religious sects throughout the world. The newspaper referred to introduced its report under huge captions: "Only one Religion Experiment." "Bold Bid to Wipe Out Barriers." "Mohammedan, Buddhist and Hindu Readings in Kirk." *En passant*, while some indiscriminating persons may regard any House of God as a "Kirk" it should be pointed out that the term "Kirk" is applicable only to an edifice erected for the purpose of some form of Scottish Presbyterian worship. Anyhow Trinity Congregational Church is to continue the "experiment," though it is something that a Presbyterian minister is not likely to touch with a large pole. On the contrary!

But is not the situation highly ironical? Protestantism—of which the Congregationalists form a considerable section—is honeycombed with sectarianism, internal dissensions and internecine strife. Reform as well as Charity should begin at home! In our early school-days we had a copy-book heading which ran, "Avoid what you blame in others." Neither Mohammedanism, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, nor Roman Catholicism can be said to be divided and split up into warring sections as Protestantism is. And now it has begun to suffer from the volcanic shocks of Christian Science and Spiritualism which have seduced many of the credulous and novelty-hunting laity.

And what is to become of Christianity, when to its temples are admitted the representatives of "heathen creeds," which organized Christianity is periodically sending out missionaries to fight against? The significance and identity of Christianity will alike be obliterated! What of the fundamentals of the faith once delivered to the saints? What of the boasted eternal verities drawn from the Holy Bible of the Christians? What of the glorious scheme of redemption and justification by faith? Ah, Mr. McClelland, it is a good job for you that you are not a Presbyterian pastor, subject to the disciplinary authority of Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly!

Gosh, what is the Salvation Army to think of this perilous innovation? For the size and wealth of the country, Scotland has proved very profitable ground for the Salvation Army. And if a big Glasgow Church attaches as much importance to Buddhism, say, as the Christian scheme of redemption as a fire-escape and means of salvation, where will the thing end? Any considerable acceptance of such an attitude of mind is menacing to the "Blood and Fire" enthusiasts. The Cross will become a meaningless symbol and the prosperous business founded by the astute William Booth will go flop! So this experiment is sure to find plenty of opposition. For after all the Salvation Army and other street-corner evangelists have been "feeders" of the Churches for a considerable time. They have made the converts and passed them on to the "respectable" Churches to be licked into shape for the better land. There-

fore Trinity Congregational Church, Glasgow may look for sneers and contempt. That Church might have found it better to start a scheme of composing Protestant dissensions. Protestant unity is certainly a *desideratum* with many pious Protestants. But reform in that direction in the hands of Protestant clerics moves very slowly. In point of historical fact the number of Protestant sects existing to-day is much greater than 100 years ago!

And yet one section of one of these Protestant sects has the assurance to try to unite all the supernaturalists of the earth! And is it sure that all those to whom it extends its invitation are Supernaturalists?

IGNOTUS.

## Freak Religions

A LADY called at my house, the other day, selling books. They proved to be publications issued by the Second Adventist or Watch Tower sect, who are led by the redoubtable Judge Rutherford, and whose activities have evidently led towards the late serious trouble in South Africa. As readers of the *Freethinker* are probably aware, these people believe very confidently in the imminent "Second Coming," and have as their great slogan "Millions now living will never die." Included in their extraordinary tenets is that the League of Nations is an invention of the Devil.

The lady was not of more than middle age, and spoke in a lively and rather cultured manner, so I thought that here was an opportunity of saying a "word in season." After I had, at her request, read a card containing a dozen lines or so of printed matter, and found her enquiring gaze upon me, the following dialogue took place:—

"This seems to be just a re-hash of ancient superstition."

"But it's based on the Bible, and the Bible's true, isn't it?"

"Well, hardly. It begins by telling us that the world and man were created, and we know that they were not."

"But if man had not been created how would you be here?"

"Have you never heard of evolution?"

"Oh yes; and if you like to think you've come from a monkey, I don't. Good morning."

One of the fraternity distributed a pamphlet among people who left the hall on the occasion of a big meeting of our Branch of the League of Nations Union; and, being a sort of "editor" of local League News, I had to point out in the local newspapers that the Watch Tower screed had nothing to do with the Union—a fact evident enough to intelligent and informed readers, but perhaps not to some others, who might have been influenced by the fervid religious character of the production and the numerous quotations from the Bible.

Truly, the obstacles to the advance of rational thinking and action are many, if most of them cannot be accounted great. On my way from King's Cross Station to the British Museum Library, Conway Hall, the R.P.A. rooms, etc., I note much evidence of the curious current developments of ancient superstition.

In Southampton Row, toward the southern end, are six nice shops with covered fronts and show cases near the footwalk. Of these three are empty, and two of the others are occupied by freak religious bodies. One displays a volume closed and open on *The Conquest of Death, An Imminent Step in Evo-*

lution, the other, volumes on *The Influence of the Zodiac on Human Life*; and both have other books and periodicals rivalling in stupidity the writings of Judge Rutherford.

About two hundred yards away, nearly opposite the British Museum, are Theosophical and Swedenborgian shops; nearer the northern end of Southampton Row is a large Christian Science Centre; and on the way to King's Cross Station (by minor roads) I pass a large Salvation Army "Citadel" or factory, as well as a hostel.

I was somewhat disappointed not to find a shop or centre of those people (I do not know what they call themselves) who publish *The Pioneer of Wisdom*. I found this periodical in the Holborn Public Library. And among other absurd stuff it contained an article on "The limits of Satan." Nor did I find a "British Israelite Centre," though I have seen some of their rather sumptuous literature (the secretary of the body, whom I met lately in a train, gave me a copy of a paper, which in size and appearance vies with such periodicals as the *Sphere*, or *Time and Tide*).

However, some at least of the more freakish bodies may be given the credit of propagating their faiths uncloaked by the claim that they are helping on civilization. This has of late become a rather marked feature of the exposition of Dr. Inge, Dean Matthews and one or two others. The Salvation Army also lays stress on its social or "rescue" work; but, as recently suggested by a reviewer in the *New Statesman*, it is probable that any good it may do is counteracted (or more than that) by its superstition, its other-worldliness, its complacency in ignorance, and of late its Fundamentalism.

However, mere theological, emotional and mystic revivals tend to have a shorter life than in previous cases, e.g., that of Moody and Sankey, so familiar, for so long a time, in our youthful days. We seem to hear less of Buchmanism; Aimee Macpherson's effort had little success in this country; and that of Mr. Evans soon fizzled out, and we now read that he lives in retirement, spending most of his time in prayer.

J. REEVES.

### Freethought Anniversaries

CONSTANTIN FRANCOIS DE CHASSEBOUF—FEBRUARY 3

IN Craon, Anjou, France, in 1757, Constantin François de Chassebouf (Count Volney), was born. In the course of his education he went to Paris in 1774, and there he met Baron D'Holbach, Atheist and Scientist, one of the best known men in France and of international fame. Volney became attached to this man, and through him met all the leaders of Sceptical and Atheistic thought.

In 1783 Volney set out on a tour of the Near East, visiting Egypt and Syria. He was absent for three years, and the principal impression on him gave rise to the question, why all the decay? Here are signs of a numerous population in a long gone past. There are the remains of a mighty Empire. But what has become of the people? why did this clever and war-like race go down? were the questions he set himself to answer. In his book *The Ruins; or A Survey of the Revolution of Empires*, he sketches the rise of Man as a product of Nature. There is no room for gods. Like his great contemporary La Place, Mathematical Astronomer, he had no need for such a hypothesis. Naked in mind and body, Nature put man on his own resources. If he required food and shelter he had to obtain them for himself. "Yes, man is become the artificer of his fate; it is himself who has created in turn the vicissitudes of his fortune, his successes and his disappointments; and if, when he reflects on the sorrows which he has associated

with human life, he has room to lament his weakness and his folly, he has perhaps still more right to presume upon his force, and be confident in his energies when he recollects from what point he has set out, and to what heights he has been capable of elevating himself."

To what did he lay the blame for the evils of Society? To ignorance and the love of accumulation! These are the two sources of all the plagues that infest the life of man! This is examined and remedies are proposed which to-day read like the words of advanced publicists. So far have we advanced after one and a half centuries! All departments of life are reviewed; the tribute paid as rent; the all-prevailing militarism; the claims of the Priests. An attack on the Ethical teaching of the twenty religious systems follows along similar lines. The Saviour of Man is Man! Man made the mistakes and must search out the remedies.

The book was translated into many languages and had a great sale, and even during the troublous times of Louis Philippe (1830-1) many editions were sold. It brought him a gold medal from the Czarina, and an appointment from Louis XVI.

When the States-General came he was elected and, to have a free hand, resigned his appointment. He it is who introduced in the National Assembly the proposal that Church property be nationalized, and at a later date proposed and carried a motion: "That the French nation renounces from this moment undertaking any war tending to increase its territory."

Later he was chosen Secretary to the Assembly, holding the post for some years. Then he was suspected of Royalist tendencies, and during the terror was imprisoned for ten months. On his release he went to the United States, where he remained some years. In 1798, when he returned to France, and for a few years more, he seems to have been in high favour with Napoleon, but in 1802, when the Concordat re-established religion in France the two men finally parted. Like all the other Freethinkers in France, Volney was bitterly opposed to that betrayal.

Volney's writings and teachings are thoroughly Freethinking.

Count Volney died April 25, 1820.

AUTOXYCUS.

### Story of a Famous Old Jewish Firm

(Continued from page 78)

THIS fair and beautiful prospectus, you will easily believe, brought vast multitudes eager to deal with the firm, and especially large multitudes of the poor, ravished with the announcement that love should be henceforth current coin of the realm; and the business spread amazingly. But at the very outset a sad mischance occurred. The Son, by far the best of the partners, was suddenly seized and murdered and buried by certain agents of the old Jewish business (furious at the prospect of losing all their rich trade), with the connivance of the Roman installed as inspector. At least, these wretches thought they had murdered the poor man, and it is admitted on every side that they buried him, but the dependants of the Firm have a strange story that he was not really killed, but arose out of his tomb after lying there for three days, and slipped away to keep company with his father, the invisible Jah, in his exceedingly private office; and they assert that he is still alive along with Jah, mollifying the old man when he gets into one of his furious passions, pleading for insolvent debtors, and in all things by act and counsel doing good for all the clients of the house. They, moreover, assert that the third partner, who as the consoling substitute for the absent Son is commonly called the Comforter, and who is very energetic, though mysteriously invisible in his operations, superintends all the details of the business in every one of the establishments. But this third partner is so difficult to catch, that, as stated before, the majority of the customers deal with the venerable mother, as the most accessible and humane personage belonging to the house.

Despite the death or disappearance of the Son, the firm prospered for a considerable time. After severe competition, in which neither side showed itself very scrupulous, the great firm of Jupiter and Co., the old Greek house, which had been strengthened by the amalgamation of the wealthiest Roman firms, was utterly beaten from the field, sold up and extinguished. In the sale of the effects many of the properties in most demand were bought in by the new firm, which also took many of the clerks and agents into its employment, and it is even said adopted in several important respects the mode of carrying on business and the system of book-keeping. But while the firm was thus conquering its most formidable competitor, innumerable dissensions were arising between its own branch establishments; every one accusing every other of dealing on principles quite hostile to the regulations instituted by the head of the house, of falsifying the accounts, and of selling an article which was anything but the genuine unadulterated bread. There were also interminable quarrels among them as to relative rank and importance.

And whether the wheat, as delivered to the various establishments, was or was not the genuine article which the firm had contracted to supply, it was soon discovered that it issued from the licensed shops adulterated in the most audacious manner. And, although the prospectus had stated most positively that the bread should be delivered to the poor customers of the firm without money and without price (and such seems really to have been the good Son's intention), it was found, in fact, that the loaves, when they reached the consumer, were at least as costly as ever loaves of any kind of bread had been. It mattered little that the wheat was not reckoned in the price, when agents', commissioners', messengers', fees, bakers' charges, and a hundred items, made the price total so enormous. When, at length, the business was flourishing all over Europe, it was the most bewildering confusion of contradictions that, perhaps, was ever known in the commercial world. For in all the establishments the agents professed and very solemnly swore that they dealt on principles of trade; yet their proceedings (save that they christened old things with new names) were identical with those which had brought to shameful ruin the most villainous old firms. The sub-managers, who were specially ordered to remain poor while in the business, and for obedience were promised the most splendid pensions when superannuated, all became rich as princes by their exactions from the clients of the house; the agents, who were especially commanded to keep the peace, were ever stirring up quarrels and fighting ferociously, not only with opposition agents but with one another. The accounts, which were to be regulated by the most honest and simple rules, were complicated, in a lawless system, which no man could understand, and falsified to incredible amounts, to the loss of the customers, without being to the gain of the firm. In brief, each establishment was like one of those Chinese shops where the most beautiful and noble maxims of justice and generosity are painted in gilt letters outside, while the most unblushing fraud and extortion are practised inside. When poor customers complained of these things, they were told that the system was perfect, that the evils were all from the evil men who conducted the business! but the good people did not further explain how the perfection of the system could ever be realized, since it must always be worked by imperfect men. Complainants thus mildly and vaguely answered were very fortunate; others, in places where the firm was very powerful, were answered by imprisonment or false accusations, or by being pelted and even murdered by mobs. Many who thought the bread badly baked were themselves thrust into the fire.

Yet so intense is the need of poor men for some bread of life, so willing are simple men to believe fair promises, that, in spite of the monstrous injustice and falsehood and cruelty and licentiousness of the managers and sub-managers and agents of the firm, the business continued to flourish, and all the wealth of Europe flowed into its coffers. And generations passed ere some persons bethought them to think seriously of the original Deed of Partnership and the fundamental principles of

the Firm. These documents, which had been carefully confined in certain old dead languages which few of the customers could read, were translated into vulgar tongues, which all could read or understand when read, and everyone began studying them for himself. This thinking of essentials, which is so rare a thought among mankind, has already produced remarkable effects, and promises to produce effects yet more remarkable in a short time.

Behold a few of the questions which this study of the first documents has raised. The Father, whom no one has seen, is there indeed such a personage? The Son, whom certainly no one has seen for eighteen hundred years, did he really come to life again after being brutally murdered? The junior partner, whom no one has ever seen, the Comforter, is he a comforter made of the wool of a sheep that never was fleeced? The business, as we see it, merely uses the names, and would be precisely the same business, if these names covered no personages. Do the managers and sub-managers really carry it on for their own profit, using these high names to give dignity to their rascality, and to make poor people believe that they have unbounded capital at their back? One is punished for defamation of character if he denies the existence of the partners, yet not the very chief of all the managers pretends to have seen any of the three!

And the vaunted Bread of Life, wherein does it differ from the old corn-of-Ceres bread, from the baking of the wheat of Mother Hertha? Chiefly in this, that it creates much more wind on the stomach. It is not more wholesome, nor more nourishing, and certainly not more cheap; and it does us little good to be told that it would be if the accredited agents were honest and supplied it pure, when we are told, at the same time, that we must get it through these agents. It is indeed affirmed that, in an utterly unknown region beyond the Black Sea, the genuine wheat may be seen growing by anyone who discovers the place; but, as no one who ever crossed the sea on a voyage of discovery ever returned, the assertion rests on the bare word of people who have never seen the corn-land any more than they have seen the partners of the firm; and their word is bare indeed, for it has been stripped to shame in a thousand affairs wherein it could be brought to the test. They tell us also that we shall all in time cross the Black Sea, and if we have been good customers shall dwell evermore in that delightful land, with unlimited supplies of the bread gratis. This may be true, but how do they know? It may be true that in the sea we shall all get drowned for ever.

(Reprinted.)

JAMES THOMSON.

(To be concluded)

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## Correspondence

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

THE PRESS AND FREEDOM

SIR,—Your caustic Editorial comments upon the freedom and policy of the press are indeed illuminating, and much of what you say is in accord with my own experience.

For many years I have supplied news and other items to various quarters, and as a general rule to have an acceptable news value material is usually preferred with a definite dramatic bias. In consequence one must necessarily emphasize or colour-up in the right direction one's personal aspect of the truth (which after all is only relative to each one of us and which can quite easily be narrowed or broadened a little to suit the occasion).

To the case-hardened reporter, sub-editor, journalist, etc., this way of thinking and writing becomes a habit which to him or her is one of the essentials of economic security. This latter, I believe is the final analysis.

As regards the free expression of fact and opinion which might be construed in the public mind as unseemly, unorthodox or unpopular, one instance may suffice although I could give many others.

I happen to hold views opposed to the doctrine of the

Sterilization of the Unfit, and when, as often, I see paragraphs and correspondence advocating it in the press (often with a suggestion of a Compulsory Medical Service) I write asking the pro-sterilizationists to describe the exact operations necessary in the cases both for males and females. Although I have written a good few letters to papers up and down the country I have never known of one to be published! Why?

It appears to me that if under the guise of a scientific medical service—based as our present one is very largely upon superstition—the people were told often enough by a slavish press that the best way to cure corns would be to extirpate their toes (or even their legs!), *hi presto!* people would “fall” for it, and likely queue up for the latest operation by which a scientific medical service had chosen to lead the dear people to a “toeless” heaven!

How much more vital are the organs of sex, should they be interfered with, than are the toes!

If not challenged soon our very heads may be in jeopardy. If that happy state does come into operation it will most likely be done in the name of a beneficent medical science, which, even to-day, with the added assistance of a slavish press can work so easily its modern miracles.

R. ERNEST WAY.

### MASONRY AND ATHEISM

SIR,—I have waited three weeks to see if anyone would rush into print, and give any reason why a “Mason” cannot become an “Atheist.” So far there has been only “Screams of silence,” which has proven very disappointing. The first time I heard this statement, it was made to me by a friend, who had heard it from a certain gentleman in the legal profession, who takes no mean part in the Freethought Movement in Manchester.

It would be a wise thing to make this an open discussion; because, in the writer’s view it is probably made in the absence of any definite information by the persons responsible for it; about the Masonic Order.

Richard Carlisle has supplied us with all the information that it is possible to secure, upon the origin and objects of Masonry, and he most definitely has shown there are no secrets which the man in the street cannot know, should he wish to acquire them.

He has shown quite clearly that it is Pagan in origin and object, and that the Oath is only taken in regard to the Signs and Pass Words.

Perhaps some of your readers will now justify the statement, who have some knowledge or evidence which they can advance in support of it.

ELEUSIS.

### THE WITCH MANIA

SIR,—Referring to Mr. Cutner’s articles on the above subject, it is now generally admitted, I think, that the so-called “sabbaths” were the relics of originally harmless, if clandestine, gatherings for the continued practice of rites associated with earlier religions. The preponderance of women at these gatherings is simply explained by their well-known conservatism in religious matters. As Christianity gained power, it was natural that Christian priests should resent the competition of other religions. They adopted every kind of method, therefore, to disparage the older religions, and I suspect that one of these methods was to encourage what we would now call *agents provocateurs*. In this connexion C. L. Ewen, in his book *Witchcraft and Demonism*, throws a sidelight upon the “devils” who attended the “sabbaths.” He writes:—

“In pre-Reformation England a number of clerics were actually accused and convicted of practising sorcery . . . but what has perhaps a greater bearing on the identification of the wandering devils of later centuries is the sexual indulgence of the ‘celibates.’ The Papal Registers of the fourteenth century are replete with mandates dispensing sons of English priests, and those who look through the English gaol delivery for the fifteenth century cannot fail to have been struck by the extraordinary number of parsons, rectors, vicars, holy-water clerks and chaplains who were arraigned for rape, and

not infrequently described in the indictments as ‘common ravishers of women.’ In hundreds of such cases, rarely is a layman arraigned, and while the clerics were never found guilty, few will believe that the reverend gentlemen entered the court faithful to their vows of celibacy. It seems not impossible, and it is certainly no libel to suggest, that of this host of concupiscent priests some adopted, as one method of indulging their carnal wants, the rôle of Satan. . . In 1624 there were 200 Romish priests and Jesuits known to be in London, and many other “celibates” must have been roaming the country. Have we not here the amorous devils in black of whom we read in English narratives?”

C. S. FRASER.

## 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.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Gee, Wood, Bryant and Tuson. Current *Freethinkers* on sale.

#### INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Gauden Hotel, Gauden Road, Clapham, S.W.4): 7.30, Mr. R. Anderson—“Social Credit.”

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Professor F. Aveling, D. Sc.—“The Will in Greek Philosophy.”

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): 8.0, Monday, February 10, Mr. A. D. McLaren—“How Christianity Spread Over Europe.”

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10): 7.30, Mr. R. H. Rosetti—“Jesus, Fascism, Freethought.”

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, H. Cutner—“Liberty, Church and the State.”

### COUNTRY

#### INDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beecheroff Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead): 7.0, D. Roger Rowlands, J.P., League of Nations Union—A Lecture.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, Birmingham): 7.30, Impromptu Debate—“Should Bachelors be Taxed?”

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Tavern Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford): 7.15, Councillor A. Stott—“The Cause of all the Trouble.”

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Labour Institute, 164 Elm Grove, Brighton): 7.30, Mr. D. Edwards—“Materialist Explanation of Christianity.”

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.20, Harper Archer (Burnley)—“Social Customs of Mankind.”

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Free Gardeners’ Hall, Picardy Place): 7.0, Mr. R. T. White—“Jesus Christ.”

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Mr. Brown—“League of Nations Union Address.”

HETTON (Club Hall): 8.0, Wednesday, February 12, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Ivor Lewis—“Cremation Society Lecture.”

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Cooper’s Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool): 7.0, W. Fielding (Liverpool)—“Marxism and Modern Thought.”

MERSEYSIDE FREETHINKERS’ FOURTH ANNUAL DINNER (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool): 6.30, Saturday, February 15. Tickets 5s. 6d. each or 10s. double (lady or gentleman) can be obtained from Mr. S. R. A. Ready, 34 Lancaster Avenue, Great Crosby, Liverpool 23.

MIDDLESBROUGH (Labour Hall, Grange Road): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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The Trustees set themselves the task of raising a minimum sum of £8,000. This was accomplished by the end of December, 1927. At the suggestion of some of the largest subscribers, it has since been resolved to increase the Trust to around £10,000, and there is every hope of this being done within a reasonably short time.

The Trust may be benefited by donations of cash, or shares already held, or by bequests. All contributions will be acknowledged in the columns of this journal, and may be sent to either the Editor, or to the Secretary of the Trust, Mr. W. Ash, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any further information concerning the Trust will be supplied on application.

There is no need to say more about the *Freethinker* itself, than that its invaluable service to the Freethought Cause is recognized and acknowledged by all. It is the mouthpiece of militant Freethought in this country, and places its columns, without charge, at the service of the Movement.

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