

# THE FREETHINKER

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— Founded 1881 —

VOL. LVI.—No. 13

SUNDAY, MARCH 29 1936

PRICE THREEPENCE

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Views and Opinions

**Man and the Supernatural**  
 BELIEVERS in the “Gestalt” psychology should find support for their theory in the attitude of multitudes of people towards the supernatural. Towards possible natural events that are out of the ordinary a healthy scepticism is usually present. If I were to say that I saw one man throw another a distance of thirty feet, or saw a man jump a height of fifty feet, or that every morning for a month I had met a different man with red hair and a crooked nose at the corner of a particular street, I should be asked for evidence before anyone would believe me. But if I said that after handling a book belonging to my grandmother a medium had told me all about my family history, or that I had seen the ghost of my grandfather in the “still watches of the night,” large numbers would not only believe me, but they would repeat it to their friends with an air of complete conviction. Or I might find a number of “Psychical Researchers” armed with a quite elaborate, but generally worthless paraphernalia, settle down to a solemn examination of goodness only knows what, and thus give to a glaring absurdity an air of reasonableness. The obvious explanation that these stories of the supernatural are either gross exaggerations or plain old-fashioned lies—both lying and exaggeration being quite common qualities of human nature—is very seldom adopted.

I do not know that this common attitude towards the supernatural ought to create surprise. After all, the ages of unbroken credulity do not lie very far behind us. Our civilization is but a thing of yesterday, and behind this lies the thousands of generations during which supernaturalism was unquestioned. During all this time no one was called upon to *prove* the activities of the gods, or that virgins actually bore children, or that medicine-men and saints could work miracles; the onus of proof lay rather with those who doubted these things; and even to-day we find thou-

sands of Christians who, swallowing without question the most absurd stories with regard to religion, call upon the Freethinker for the most elaborate demonstration of a scientific proposition before they will accept it. To paraphrase a statement of Spinoza, in a world where nothing is certain anything is possible, and “impossibility” becomes a meaningless word. We are too little removed from the ages of credulity for vagrant ghosts and spirits to be met with a healthy initial incredulity. As the Gestaltist would say, the past has given us a mental pattern, which to-day tends to subdue everything to its own inclinations.

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Ghost Hunting

I have been thinking thus while reading Mr. Harry Price's *Confessions of a Ghost Hunter* (Putnam, ros. 6d.). Mr. Price has been for many years an energetic ghost hunter, but his hunting has never yet been rewarded with a sight of a single real ghost, he has never touched “a vanished hand” or heard “a voice that was still,” although many ghostly hands have vanished and many ghostly voices have been stilled by his mere presence. Now and then he seems to think that he very nearly caught a ghost, but up to the present he is like a gold digger who has never “struck colour,” or a backer of certainties who has never backed a winner, or a scalp hunter who has never lifted a scalp. This analogy is very close for one cannot help the suspicion that Mr. Price is encouraged in his hunting by stories of other ghost hunters who have been more fortunate than himself.

Thirty years of searching after ghosts with a complete want of success does not appear to have diminished the ardour of Mr. Price. No sooner does he get news of a new ghost than he packs up his paraphernalia of detectivescopes (the phrase is mine) sleeps in haunted beds, or on the floors of haunted rooms, registers all sorts of sounds, takes down the statement of every imaginative liar or romancer he can get hold of, and then achieves—yet one more failure. One does not know which to admire more, the persistency of Mr. Price or the self-effacing bashfulness of the ghost. After all, one would imagine that ghosts manifest themselves in order to be seen, or heard, and the plainer and the more incontestable and the more public the appearance the better pleased the ghost ought to be. A ghost that having killed a man returns to the scene of his crime, dressed in the very clothes he used to wear, who goes round groaning and making all sorts of noises, is acting thus, one would think, to attract attention. One would also imagine that, bearing in mind the immense number of ghosts there must be—far greater than the present population of the globe—ghosts should be as plentiful as blackberries in September. But not so. Ghosts are as hard to catch as salamanders. Mr. Price says he has been, for over thirty years, challenging the ghost to come, has invented all sorts of traps to secure



one, and yet he is as far from his goal as ever, and confesses that he does not even know whether the dead go on living. He does think that now and again, very rarely, he has come across traces of a genuine ghost, that is, he has not uncovered the machinery of the ghostly appearance. But his experience warrants one in saying that given time and further precautions, the probably real ghost would join the ranks of the "fakes."

\* \* \*

### The Bashful Spirits

For those who are interested in ghost-hunting or the exposure of the tricks of the vast army that live upon the belief in the supernatural Mr. Price's book will be full of interest, as it will be for those who are interested in the psychology of imposture. The latter will find many cases for a note book, even though Mr. Price steers clear of the psychological side of the subject. He has a special chapter on how to test mediums, and on the very curious fire-walking experiment recently tried in this country, and elaborate accounts of many of the ghost hunts in which he has been engaged. The exposures that Mr. Price narrates pay tribute to his mechanical skill, as does the chapter on that prize-winning fake, spirit photographs. There are also a number of plates in the volume, and the gullibility of the "spiritually-minded" may be seen by the four portraits of Madame Picquart, a famous "Transfiguring medium." This lady's speciality was reproducing different facial characteristics of dead people. (The theory is that she was controlled by the spirits to whom the different faces belonged.) All we can say is that those who fail to see the same face in each portrait, plus obvious and intentional distortions, must be very, very gullible. Madame Picquart may have been a success in the seance room; in a music hall she would have been hissed off the stage as a hopeless "dud."

In one or two cases Mr. Price says he is convinced that "genuine phenomena occurred." One is puzzled at the expression, because he says more than once that the question of what happens after death, and consequently the existence of ghosts, still baffles him. So by "genuine phenomena," Mr. Price can only mean phenomena, the cause of which he cannot trace. Many years ago, when I first saw Maskelyne and Cook's exhibition, I was equally unable to see how their tricks were done, but I did not, therefore, conclude that the supernatural was involved. Mr. Price, with his elaborate array of mechanical and other helps, often broke through the mystery of the seance room, and dissipated many a ghost. By what rule does he decide that the tricks he was not able to expose belong to a category that lifts them above deception, conscious or unconscious? In the light of the long list of exposures that has to be placed to the credit of Mr. Price, I cannot see that the few "reserved" cases he has are, on further investigation, likely to turn out substantially different from those he has completely exposed. After all, the dexterity of the trickster usually grows as his public becomes more alert.

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### Helping the Enemy

But while *Confessions of a Ghost Hunter* is an interesting volume, whether one reads it as a chronicle of sheer superstition, as a kind of detective story in which the detective is constantly being brought up against delusion, illusion, or downright trickery, or as a series of exhibitions of new possibilities in human faculty, I am not sure but that Mr. Price's method of approach, as well as that of other ghost-

hunters, does not give a vogue to ghosts that would not otherwise exist. I do not think that at any time there has been such a determined attempt as exists to-day to surround one of the most primitive superstitions with an air of sober science. There are Societies formed whose business it is to "investigate" ghostly and other alleged "psychic" occurrences; their workshops are dignified with the name of laboratories, and men such as Mr. Price spend their time inventing appliances and a technique for the purpose, not of avowedly exposing fraud, but with the declared intention of seeing how much truth there is in tales the falsity of which has been exposed times out of number. The names of eminent men are associated with this work, although most of them are *not* at all eminent in the only direction that would give "investigations" real value. And no number of exposures of the nature of these "spirit" appearances seems enough to form the basis for a reliable generalization that will serve as a guide in the future. For example, time after time, materializing mediums have been detected in fraud; so have the purveyors of portraits of spirits. But let another medium come along with a slightly different method, having learned something from previous exposures, and this army of pseudo-scientific investigators gathers together with unbroken solemnity, as though for the first time they are invited to watch a performance which has never before been witnessed.

What is the net result of all this? It does not prevent imposture. It does not prevent impostors swindling the public. It does not throw light upon obscure or little known phases of psychology (developments here have come from different quarters altogether; they have been brought about by men who treated this ghost-hunting with the contempt it deserves). What it does is to awaken with the more ignorant portion of the public the feeling that there must be something in it, otherwise so many eminent men would not bother with it. I have not the slightest doubt that if every time there is a story in some remote village of the activity of a local "witch," some body of well-known men set out to investigate the possibility of witches, we should soon have a revival of witchcraft.

For one must remember, as I said at the commencement of these notes, that behind the very imperfectly liberated intelligence of to-day, whether we are dealing with ordinary men and women or with those in high places and holding positions in the intellectual world, behind each of them there are the thousands of centuries of pre-scientific life, the traditions and customs and surviving institutions and habits of a superstition-soaked society. A consequence of this is the existence of a general mind that unconsciously weaves its experience into a pattern determined by its past. In any case and in every society the dice are heavily loaded in favour of superstition, and when the most primitive of all superstitions, that of the ghost, is treated seriously by prominent men and Societies with loud-sounding titles one should not be surprised if it encourages rather than discourages superstition. In view of this it might be well if some of our ghost-hunters kept this point of view before them, and treated the superstition of ghosts, of dancing furniture and mysterious knockings as they would treat the superstition of witchcraft or of demonic possession. For we have not in these experiments an investigation of *new* evidence. What we have is a repeated examination of the same evidence; and the persistency with which this is done is perhaps the clearest and strongest proof of how powerful to-day is the influence of man's uncivilized past.



## The Indiscretions of Dean Inge

"Whoever prods us to noble action is making for the welfare of the world."—*Havelock Ellis.*

"Light, more light."—*Goethe.*

DEAN INGE is a clergyman who "wears his rue with a difference." Journalists, in search of a telling phrase, have dubbed him "the gloomy dean." As a fact, his solemnity is not very marked, unless one compares him with, say, the Bishop of London. One cannot imagine Dean Inge as other than "a scholar, and a ripe, good one." What the Dean says on any subject is bound to be interesting and provocative, which is more than can be said of so many pastors and reverends.

In a recent article (*Evening Standard*, March 4), the Dean was at his best and bravest in discussing the question as to whether there was such a thing as a religion of all sensible men, as distinguished from the superstitions of the half-wits and the illiterates. And what he has to say is both illuminative and instructive. He decides that, if there be such a form of religion, "it must be quite independent of the disputed tenets and dogmas of the Churches." Not one Church, but all Churches, mark you! It must be outside all the denominations. And then the Dean goes on to suggest that it must also correspond with the national ideal of character, which he says, urbanely, is neither Greek, nor Jewish, nor Catholic Christian, but Gothic. And he sums up by adding that though sensible people do not all wish to be Christians, they all wish to be gentlemen, in the best and highest sense of that much-abused word. He is careful to emphasize the saving clause, for he has no wish to be accused of anything approaching snobbery in such an association. The Dean is, obviously, not thinking at all in terms of heraldry or property, but in the sense in which we say that William Shakespeare and Charles Lamb were both gentle men. The Dean even quotes Lindsay Gordon, as illustrating the ideals of the average decent Englishman, and the lines are well worth repeating:—

Life is mostly froth and bubble;  
Two things stand like stone—  
Kindness in another's trouble,  
Courage in our own.

Dean Inge points out, acutely, that the dominant note in this religion of all sensible men is humanism, which he says is a new thing in Europe. He traces this sentiment to pre-Revolutionary France, and refers to Voltaire's "righteous indignation" at the torture and legal murder of Jean Calas. The Dean himself is not unsympathetic, for he describes these tortures as "sickening, even if Calas had not been innocent, as he certainly was." Glancing down the years, Dean Inge notices that cruelty is still prevalent on the Continent, not only in such sports as bull-fights, but in actual torture of political prisoners at Barcelona at the time that Ferrer was shot.

The Dean is critical on occasion. He notes the insularity of Englishmen, and suggests that "the glory that was Greece" has little meaning for the Briton, who would only be "amused at Ulysses, with a wife in every port and a lie for every emergency," and whose root objection to "King David," "the man after God's own heart," is that this Oriental was "no gentleman."

It is related that a French officer, who witnessed the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, said: "It is magnificent, but it is not war!" So, concerning Dean Inge's "religion of all sensible men," it may be said: "It is magnificent, but it is not Christianity as known for two thousand years." Divorced as it is from religious orthodoxy, this new creed "of all

sensible men" is but the religion of humanity, and has much in common with pure Secularism. The Dean himself has an inkling of the truth, for, just as he is getting to grips with this momentous subject, he suggests that mysticism is the only creed fit for an educated man, and breaks off a most interesting discussion.

But the average decent Englishman is insular, inclined to be practical, and least likely to be attracted by mysticism in any form. A mystic, to him, is simply a man in a mist, a thing to be got away from at the first opportunity. The Nothingarianism which the Dean regards as the sensible man's religion is poles asunder from any transcendentalism. Yet he will not admit that it is a half-way-house to Secularism. Indeed, the Dean actually says that such a view of life is "low and unheroic," simply because it leaves out Christianity. He should have remembered the dignified words of Francis Bacon:—

Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not.

There is one piece of unconscious humour in the Dean's article which is worth noting. He is under the impression that the average decent citizen has a religion for weekdays, and another for Sundays. He seems to think that this citizen is a Secularist for the greater part of each week, and that he turns Christian for an hour or so on Sundays, when he lolls in his pew and confesses that he is a miserable sinner. Hamlet advised that Polonius should play the fool nowhere but in his own home, and Dean Inge's "average decent citizen" might have remembered that piece of advice, and not paid the parson for the privilege of making a public exhibition of himself.

Apart from that, the Dean's article is noteworthy. He does not so much as mention Comte's Positivism, but the influence of the great French thinker is very apparent. The Dean's picture of the religion of sensible people is, in the last analysis, but Positivism, for the Dean will not admit the soft impeachment of having blessed such an awful thing as Secularism. The Dean but follows the beaten track of theology in his final gesture in favour of Mysticism. Mysteries, forsooth! Wishing to keep religion in mystery, or obscurity, he objects to explanations. He cannot tolerate that men should discuss these things too inquiringly. Even if the critics are right, the very subject is taboo. The older theologians of the Ages of Faith were definite; the modern defenders of the faith are so very indefinite. As man advances, the gods retire. With each increase of our knowledge of Nature the sphere of the so-called "supernatural" is lessened. Presently people will find that deities and devils are but the reflections of man's imagination and the symbols of his ignorance.

After all is said, the Dean's belated discovery of the average decent citizen's aversion from historic Christianity is not altogether surprising. Alleged to be "a religion of love," its professional exponents still preach a hell of literal fire, Christian battleships, and bless regimental flags. In other words, these priests perpetuate the worst forms of barbarism, and pretend, hypocritically, that they are of real service to the State in so doing. The Dean is a humane man himself, and seeks shelter in a Mysticism, which does more credit to his heart than to his head. Let him look a little closer into this matter, and he will discover that the conscience of the race is rising slowly above a two-thousand years' old Oriental creed, which, but for its being a huge vested interest, would long since have been relegated to the limbo of half-forgotten things.



## The Man on the Poster

"Don't criticize the Church from the outside," said the man on the wayside poster, pointing straight at me, "You can't judge a stained-glass window from the outside. Come next Sunday."

Armed with a halfpenny, a pious expression, and a resolve not to be drawn into argument, I took his advice, though I cunningly cheated him by taking my patronage to another church.

Arriving absurdly early, to wit, fifteen minutes before the start (the game is to come as late as possible in order to capture the maximum attention), I whiled away the time by such thrilling pastimes as finding the oldest tombstone and reading the hall notices. From the latter I was initiated into the secrets of the Church Sisters, the Juvenile Class (defunct) and another group (unborn).

The congregation began to assemble like a secret society on the eve of a dark plot, and I marked one of them as the inhabitant of the oldest grave. Through a secret entrance came stealing three arch-conspirators, who took up an exalted position beside the music. I had been looking to these to augment the modest proportions of the assembly, and I was now seized with a fear that my visit was in vain, that the minister, on seeing so small an audience, would angrily declare the meeting off. I was wrong. He exuded equanimity.

The choir was entirely dominated by a severe-looking, bespectacled soprano, who remains in my dreams as Ernestine. Wherever the congregation proclaimed that they were miserable sinners, Ernestine was the most miserable, when they declared their need of the Holy Spirit, Ernestine was the most needy, and when they solemnly announced that they had been saved from some terrible butchering by the blood of the Saviour, Ernestine was the most bloodthirsty. At the Amen a group of elderly ladies, alias the Church Sisters, stayed the course well, and were the only ones to vie (unsuccessfully) with her.

The sermon had its interesting moments. The preacher's head would take a sudden upward jerk. "What is the purpose of God?" he inquired, addressing his remark to a small white statue, which made no reply. "Why are we here?" briskly turning to the choir. Like the statue they remained silent. "What is life about?"—this time with a note of impatience, and a very sharp turn to the elderly ladies, who were no more informative than the choir or the statue. "Where is the meaning of it all?"—quite peevishly this time, and giving the dear old ladies another dose. They still made no reply, but two of them blinked.

Having severely exposed our ignorance he proceeded to put us wise. Without faith, he later remarked, you cannot bear fruit in your lives, though I am sure many of us, including the elderly ladies, had no such intention, though if he looked at them as accusingly as he looked at me, they must have taken the lesson well to heart.

I had later to observe how a congregation, acting with the unanimity of a flock of birds changing course, can suddenly dip out of sight.

Now as we churchgoers know, it is easier to enter than to depart from church. I was once buttonholed by a lady who held out the bait of financial gain if I would associate myself with Christian Science! A more recent argument ended like this:

"Young man, 'ave you got a mother?"

"Yes."

"Then y'ought ter be ashamed o' yoursel'."

Therefore, when I sensed a miserable sinner bearing upon me with a smile terrifying in its sickliness, I quickened pace, left the Church Sisters far behind, lit a cigarette, and strode out into civilization once more.

G. H. TAYLOR.

## Mad

(Concluded from page 165)

OUTSIDE the nunnery Brothers Fernando and Diego left Brother Juan, who had business in the neighbourhood. Calling their carriage they set out for the town, meditating on the miracle which they had been privileged to witness, and setting out the facts in order. (1) The fluxation first appeared on the Holy Day of the Invention of the Cross five years ago and has continued whatever be the health of the Prioress. (2) There are always five drops and the shape of the wound remains unchanged. (3) The drops are exactly the same distance apart, as if measured. (4) This would be supernatural if it occurred only once, on account of the difficulty of counterfeiting; for it to have occurred on every Friday for five years removes any possibility of deceit, since if a wound were continually re-opened by craft it could not preserve its symmetry. (5) It may therefore be taken as a true miracle which God alone can produce, so as to testify in favour of the Divinity of the Cross and the wounds of the Saviour, as the whole Faith and the Christian Religion are likewise established on this Mystery. (6) Its purport can only be to awaken men, that sleep in these days, of the approaching end. (7) God has designed the pattern of the five drops to remove any fear that this case may be another of the many cases where people have been deceived by the Devil.

As the carriage was nearing the town, there came a shout from the driver, and the Fathers learned that there was trouble with the harness, which would need at least half an hour to be mended; and as the man pointed out a house standing back from the road, which he declared to be a public hostelry, they decided to wait therein, the day being frosty. They knocked at the front door, and, getting no answer, were about to return to the carriage; but they noticed a side-door ajar, and went to try if they might find someone by entering there. On opening the door they found themselves in the kitchen, a large well-appointed room with a blazing fire in the hearth, towards which they advanced. It was only as they stood before the fire, warming their hands, that they discovered another presence in the room. They heard the gurgling of a baby, and turned to see a young woman seated in a low chair beside the table. She was exceedingly sweet of countenance, with golden hair braided across her forehead, and on her lap she held a baby which she had lately been suckling, for both her paps were fully bared, and on them were gathering goutis of milk.

"Cover yourself, O young woman," said Brother Diego sternly, but she continued only to smile at him.

At this moment there entered from the back the master of the house, who, showing a proper respect for his guests, hastily set forth wine and food, although it was not requested of him.

"We require nothing," said Brother Fernando, "except the shelter of your kitchen for an half an hour, while the trappings of our carriage are mended; and meanwhile it would be best if you as the master of the house would order this young woman to show a more seemly countenance."



The old man shook his head. "I deeply regret that it would be no use, holy sirs," he said. "For nothing short of violence would make her cover herself unless she had the whim herself to do it, and I have no liking of violence against my poor daughter. She is to be pitied, holy sirs, for she is not in her right mind."

We looked at the girl's face again, and beheld the same thoughtless smile, pretty to see: Indeed, had it not been for the snare of the bared paps we should have agreed that we had never seen a smile so guileless and almost angelic, so cunning is the Devil.

"But you cannot allow her to disport herself thus shamelessly," said Brother Diego, "whether she be in or out of her wits. For when the wits are out, the Devil is in. Make her seemly, or you will have to answer for it."

"I care not how I answer for it," said the old man, "so long as she suffers not. For I have nought left in my life but this girl."

"And is she married?" asked Brother Fernando.

"No," said the old man, and wiped his brow. "I care not that you know my shame, since all the world knows it. And worse shame for those that took advantage of my poor girl, because in her silly ways she is too fond and kind-hearted to say nay."

"But has not your parish-priest," asked Brother Fernando, "tried his hand upon this creature?"

"That he has," said the old man, "and against no one would I less readily say a word than against him, for there is no better man. But he is not learned like your excellencies, and after he had sprinkled her with holy water he gave it up, since he had no more effect than that she smiled up at him, even as she is now smiling at you both. And he said that the Devil must have his will sometimes, which made it safer for us others, and that he wished the Devil never did worse, though he meant no harm in saying so, for he wept heartily, and often gives the poor girl a silver coin, which he can but badly spare, and which she drops after a while in the mud, having no care for such things except as they sparkle in the sun."

"Much can be done if God so wills," said Brother Fernando.

"Not with her," said the old man stubbornly.

"That is heresy," said Brother Diego sharply.

"Do you set up to read the mind of God?"

"No, no," said the old man. "Even have it your way, and if you could cure her my heart and all would be yours."

"There was a girl," said Brother Fernando, "who was possessed by a devil, and who was cured after being kept in a cell for seven days fasting and then given holy water to drink. She broke wind and the devil passed out of her, leaving her faint but of whole mind. We shall see what can be done with your daughter."

"No, no," pleaded the old man senselessly, and wrung his hands. "Do her no harm, or she will die. She is so tender-hearted. When first it came over her, I used to lock her up, for it was in the summer and she would not keep her clothes on at all. So I locked her in her room, and the way she wept did so rive my heart that I let her out. But as soon as my eye was off her, she would throw away her gown, and her whole delight was to lie outstretched on the grass in the little garden that I have at the back, watching the birds. I thought no harm would come of it, for the hedges are high. But the youths got to know and they crept in upon her, and she, poor silly, had no fear of them and so is now the mother of that baby. Though she has no more maiden modesty left than a dog that lifts his leg to a post, yet is she no worse

than the birds of the air, having no knowledge of what she does. So that surely God will pardon her."

"Lived she alone in the world, so might we consider," said Brother Fernando, "but in this world of mortal sinners she is a temptation to the weak and the sinful."

We looked at her and thought (for we spoke of it after) that she seemed like a very picture of the Holy Mother, except for the naked paps set forth as a snare for men and angels, and we thought again how shrewd is Satan to counterfeit the things of God, putting out the table of demons, as St. Augustine remarks, in the cave of Mithras to mock at the holy mass. So that we knew that in looking on the beauty of this girl, who smiled on us, we were looking on Satan himself.

The old man went with stumbling feet to a side-table and brought us a waterkeg with silver and gold bands of infidel design. "It is all that I have left to tell me of my son," he said, "who died fighting the Moors and Turks and Blasphemers. He sent it to me before he died, out of his spoils, and I do not know where he lies, for he was wounded by a cannonball and carried over the side of the ship. So wrote to me his comrade, whose name I forget. This it was that crazed my poor girl, for she doted upon her brother, and refused a good offer of marriage because it would have meant her removal from these parts, though in the end he came back nowhere. When she heard of his death, she grew wild and screamed and was like to die; she was so angrily mad that we feared to go near her. But on the third day she came and said, 'I am going to him,' and she went to the Church and stood before the image of Christ on the Cross and came back here smiling as now you see her, and ever since she has been quite happy, so that if it were not for her immodesty I should be blessing the Lord. For she never wishes to go outside the walls of the house and the garden, except sometimes to the Church, but she goes only there and back straightway. I do what I can to keep my eye on her, but I am a poor man and have no help except one boy. The midwife said that the birth of the child might clear her wits, but no such thing happened. She is the same as she was, and now I have no hopes of a change. I pray only that she be left to me as she is, for she is so tender-hearted and cannot bear a hard word or a closed door."

There was then a knocking, and the coachman called that the harness was mended. Brother Fernando placed a coin on the table, and we went out, followed by the innkeeper, who sobbed aloud. The girl paid no heed at all. We both had the same thought: that when we had reached the town we must make arrangements for a further effort to expel the devil that had so foully lodged within this girl, and that, if such effort failed as the father prophesied, then she must be straitly confined where she would no longer be a stumbling-block in the path of the righteous and a gaudy rag of sin to entice the weak.

JACK LINDSAY.

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The whole theory of the special and supernatural, and all that was twined with it or educed out of it, departs as a dream. . . . It is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women. . . . There will be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile—perhaps a generation or two—dropping off by degrees. A superior breed shall take their place. A new order shall arise; and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest.—Walt Whitman.



## Freethought Anniversaries

PIERRE SIMON LAPLACE—MARCH 23, 1749

LAPLACE was born of peasant parentage at Beaumont in Normandy. Through the kindness of some better-off people who saw talent in the boy, he was enabled to study at the local military school, where he was afterwards a teacher. At 18 years of age he went to Paris, and there he spent the next 60 years. There also he rapidly obtained notice as a mathematician and astronomer, and was recognized as a leading investigator and teacher by scientists of international repute.

His greatest work was his *Mécanique Céleste*, of which Volume I. appeared in 1799, and Volume V. and last, in 1825. Newton's *Principia*, published in 1687, started a new epoch in the field of Natural Philosophy, and it was the aim of Laplace to include in his great work all that had been discovered in the interval.

Prior to this, he had published, in 1796, a book for popular use, containing no algebra and less geometry. Probably because of this it was one of the clearest and easiest books on Astronomy ever written. It was the *Exposition du Système du Monde*. At that time the motions of the seven then known planets, motions of rotation and revolution, were, with trivial exceptions, well-known. These motions were all in one direction; uniformity suggests law or at least a working hypothesis.

The existence of Nebulae had been known since the days of Galileo (1564-1642) and in Laplace's own day Herschel had discovered hundreds more. The nature of the objects was unknown; there was no spectroscope and photography was unknown. Herschel thought it some kind of "Shining Fluid, of a nature totally unknown to us." They were of all shapes; they were of great variety in size, scattered all over the sky and at all sorts of angles to the solar system. Some of them showed an apparent condensation near the centre; there were some whose shape suggested a whirlpool. Laplace in a speculative kind of way put forward what has become known as the "Nebular Hypothesis." Suppose that a quantity of this nebulous matter was occupying the space of the Solar System; suppose that by some means a movement about an axis was set up, then condensation and cooling, the throwing off of planets and the isolation of a central sun might easily result. It was put forward as a conjecture, and he expressed his "distrust of conjectures," "a distrust which everything which is not a result of observation or of calculation ought to inspire." Much more was known before his death about our system (minor planets for instance), but he never withdrew or revised his Hypothesis. He had also applied it to star systems. Of the storm in the theological camp he took no notice. Nor did he pay much—if any—attention to the mathematical criticisms. Weird and wonderful some of them were. What this substance was they did not know. Is it a substance? was a question they never seemed to ask, and not till nearly 40 years after his death did they learn from Sir William Huggins what the "Shining Fluid" was; a gas, not known anywhere else, to which the name "Nebulium" has been given; and just the kind of "stuff" that Laplace needed!

And since then we have had a mass of information which it seems impossible for any of us to assimilate. We have still new and newer conjectures—if we were but honest enough to call them such—but all on Materialist lines. That is Laplace's great service to humanity; he took God out of the skies and replaced him by Natural Laws.

Laplace died at Paris on March 5, 1827. It is said that on his death-bed he said "What we know is but little, what we know not is immense."

AUTOLYCUS.

There are few superstitions which have been so universal as a belief in witchcraft. The severe theology of paganism despised the wretched superstition, which has been greedily believed by millions of Christians.

Buckle.

## Acid Drops

There is not to be any war in Europe—for the present. This is not because there is any deep-seated antagonism to war on the part of the different governments, our own included, but because the opposing forces are not yet clearly aligned, and because all are rather doubtful about the security of the home front in the event of war. And the Government having at length made public its programme of rearmament, decided on long before the general election, is content to continue manœuvring for a continuation of the armistice that began in 1918, and is, to some extent, still in being.

As to the general public, its attitude is that of spasmodic sentimentality to-day against war, to-morrow regarding it as "inevitable." To-day it may vote against war, to-morrow it may become a nation of flag-waggers processioning against the "enemy," the said enemy not defined until war is declared. The clergy, that section that but a little time ago were shrieking "No more war," and threatening this and that if war was attempted, have now adopted a quiet attitude as against their clamorous vocability of yesterday. If war comes, the Government may rest with certainty on the fact that the parsonry will, as usual, become ardent recruiting agents, and will justify General Crozier's description of them as being "the finest creators of blood lust" we have.

It is said that in a conversation with Lloyd George, at the end of the Peace Treaty Conference, Clemenceau said that if Britain desired peace in the world it would have to give as well as take. France would give up much of its colonial possessions because, he said, France needed peace more than any other country in the world. Would England join in a giving? Lloyd George thought not. Then, said Clemenceau "there is nothing for France to go on arming until such time as some country overruns us and grinds us into the dust. We are a small country, and in the end that is likely to happen."

Now whether that conversation be true or not, it is *ben trovato*. It represents the basic facts of the situation. Clemenceau was saying only that you cannot have competing imperialisms in the world without wars. While nations regard huge tracts of the world as being their own private domains on which others are only permitted to walk at the good will of the "proprietors," wars must come. Treaties are and navies must exist and private air forces and armies and navies must exist and they are torn up or ignored by every country that finds it to its interest to ignore them. When it is done is a matter of opportunity. How it is done is a matter of personal taste.

The one way to stop war is for the leading countries in the world to put it out of their power to wage it, as provinces, cities, and individuals put it out of their power to wage private war. To talk of national honour as forbidding this is stark nonsense. There is nothing more dishonourable in nations submitting every dispute to the arbitrament of a court, than there is in a similar practice in civilized societies and with civilized individuals. The other method, whether practised as between nations or with individuals is the method of the bully and the brigand. The work of an army should be the work of a police force, and if the world has neither the sense nor the courage to internationalize this particular force, then, as Clemenceau said, there is nothing for it but to go on arming and still greater arming, until civilization finally falls before the developed scientific savagery of the human race.

Finally, a word on the talk of risk we run in not getting ready for war. The risk is admitted, but it is not a question of risk against security, it is a question of which risk is the greater, and which risk will we take. Our *experts* (we italicize the word, because, as during the war of 1914, the Government can always obtain what-



ever expert opinion it desires) assure us that the next war will probably mean the break-up of civilization. There could hardly be a greater risk than this. There would not be greater risk in deciding that some more equitable distribution of the wealth of the earth, or control of the seas and lands than exists at present should be made, or deciding that a militaristic imperialism means inevitable war, and taking firm steps to check that, than there is in treading a road which all but a fool or a Cabinet Minister must realize will end in war sooner or later. As Clemenceau said, it is a question of what are the nations ready to give for the sake of peace. We are ready to risk everything for the sake of retaining militarism, might it not be worth while risking a little in the cause of peace? The question before the nations is ultimately this: "Who will risk a World Peace?" The future appears to turn largely upon the answer.

We do not know what are the exact facts concerning the troubles in Spain, but we note that great play is being made in many English papers concerning the burning of Churches. We deprecate this as much as anyone can, although we are no more against burning churches than we are other buildings. But with regard to the Churches, it must be born in mind that a very large section of press efforts and government influence is, in this country, always cast against revolutionists, when the revolutionists are not associated with exiled Kings, struggling to get back, and Churches fighting for re-establishment. So it is worth mentioning that the *News-Chronicle* for March 19 report that in churches in Madrid two bands of armed Fascists were arrested. It is quite evident that we are not getting the whole truth about Spain.

By the way, we note that many of the papers constantly refer to the *King of Spain*. There is no such person. A King should exist only with the consent of the people; and when the people withdraw that consent the King ceases to exist. He can only be recreated in defiance of the people's will by an act of revolution. Nothing is more absurd in these days than to talk of a man who was King, and is now in exile, as fighting for the restoration of his "rights." He has no greater rights, once his office has been taken away, than an ex-Prime Minister has to use force or enter into plots for the restoration of his premiership.

Of course, the Archbishop of Canterbury ought to be an authority concerning the next world, and he is certainly paid enough for one to consider him an expert. All the same we are a trifle puzzled as to the precise meaning of his words at the funeral of Earl Beatty in St. Paul's Cathedral, a building devoted to the gospel of turning one cheek when the other is smitten. The Archbishop said of the dead Admiral, that with

All earthly stains cleansed, all earthly failings pardoned, his great gifts disciplined and perfected will surely still be used by God who gave them for some high service in that other country where God unhindered reigns.

Now what does it mean? Lord Beatty was a sailor, a fighting man. Are we to understand that God will use Beatty to command some aerial navy in heaven? And who will he be fighting against in the world in which God's will is unhindered? In that case it would seem there would be nothing for Beatty, or anyone else, to do, for if God's will is unhindered, then everything will be exactly as God wishes it to be. It looks as though the Archbishop got a little mixed. But we suppose that as at a Royal funeral, a King just dead is the embodiment of all that is wise and virtuous, so an Admiral dead is so valuable a character that even God must have some special use for him in the next world.

A writer in a Catholic journal says that a friend would be prepared to accept Catholicism if only she were convinced that the doctrine of Limbo was reasonable. She does not think that the souls in Limbo give due glory to God. The priestly reply is that "every-

thing that has being, gives glory to God; even the damned in Hell manifest God's glory." If that does not convince the waverer about Limbo, we are afraid nothing will. And we are glad to see that there is none of this Modernist nonsense about Limbo being a state and not a place. It is, we affirm, just as much a place as is Hell, Purgatory or Heaven.

We often find ourselves in agreement with certain Christian's description of themselves. We are not alluding to St. Francis's boast of being "God's Juggler"—although most Christians "juggle" with obvious facts. Nor were we thinking of "God's Fools," or the many claims made by Christians that they are "Babes in Christ." We are at the moment referring to the constant reiteration by Christians that they claim "superiority" as Christians. As the Rev. Dr. Garfield Williams (Dean of Manchester) said recently, "A Christian is a privileged person—he has a status, position and dignity that he was in no way to forget." We know them well. They never do forget it. Dean Williams is an excellent example. His whole teaching is that only in his religion's triumph can come the "vast, cosmic, universal salvation" the world needs. When the day comes, if ever it comes, when Christians become modest enough to admit that human effort, independent of religion, is important and worthy of encouragement, then we shall hear less of "the Christian's privileged position."

The Rev. F. C. Spurr adds to the gaiety of mankind by his definition of the ideal church. "It is ready to sweep into itself anybody who is decent in living and generous in giving. And yet the Comprehensive Church is right." Mr. Spurr rather gilds the lily by showing that even the decency in living is not always a *sine qua non*. He quotes the case of the somewhat bestial Corinthian Christians, "described as saints, and 'called out,' but let anybody read St. Paul's letter to that Church, then think again about the exclusive Church." Mr. Spurr omits to add that whatever toleration the Apostles, ancient and modern, may have had for those who cannot be said to be conspicuous for the decency of their lives, the Church never welcomed those who failed in his second condition. Corinthians might remain in the fold, but Ananias was "excluded" in every sense of the word, because he "kept back" money he was expected to "cough up" for the Pauline Offertory.

Dr. Lukyn Williams has gathered together in his *Ad-versus Judæos* the anti-Jewish polemic of Christian literature from the second to the fifteenth century. Readers, we are told by a Christian writer, can now see "what Christian authors have to say about the Jews, how much they understood the Jewish position, and what efforts they made to convince the Jews of their error in rejecting Christ." The critic has to admit that their reasoning was pretty poor for "it is hardly surprising that Jewish opinion remained unconvinced by a purely Christian exegesis of their own texts," and that Dr. Williams insists that "Christians would have done better to have aimed at presenting the moral and spiritual pre-eminence of Christ." Yes, but that would not have made the Jews believe Jesus was the son of their own God. The "moral and spiritual pre-eminence of Jesus" is maintained by Unitarians and Theists who reject Christianity.

In any case when the Jews rested unconverted and unconvinced by what is now acknowledged to be very poor arguments, the Christians decided that "persecution" was a better way; and so commenced the torture and massacre of the Jewish race throughout the centuries. So far, the Jews have won in the intellectual conflict, for more and more are Christians relying for their case on a "moral" Jesus rather than on a genuine son of God. The Virgin Birth is becoming discredited, the miracles are a joke, and the Resurrection can only rest upon "faith." In fact, sometimes it is not genuine Christianity which Christians are trying to save but *Theism*; and Judaism, on that point, is also breaking up.



A minister is required for the Parish of Midmar, situated about fifteen miles from Aberdeen. The job is advertised in a Scottish newspaper under Situations Vacant, and sandwiched between applications for Grieve-Cattlemen, Halflins, Hairdressers, Trappers and other quite useful occupations. No qualifications of any kind are stipulated, not even a creed being mentioned. Of course it is well-known in the North of Scotland that God is a good Presbyterian. Applications must be sent in by March 31. The word Aberdeen need not deter applicants, for there are quite respectable emoluments of Three Hundred and Fifty Pounds per year, freedom from rates and a "splendid manse and garden" being thrown in.

One upon a time God gave a serious Call to his elect, with which the recipients wrestled in prayer manfully, with one eye on their maker and the other on the terms of the Offer received by post. Other times other manners, and now God in his condescension deigns to enlarge his Kingdom through the humble agency of the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*.

The religious life of Stanton-in-the-Peak in Derbyshire is full of vicissitudes. The congregation of the Parish Church has dwindled to three old pensioners. The windows are broken; through holes in the roof one can plainly discern the wonders of God. Forty-seven attempts have been made to wreck the vicar's car; his children have been attacked; threats have been made to poison his valuable pedigree dog. The Consistory Court have been considering the case, and the Chancellor has stated, after, no doubt, mature reflection "it seems to be that the vicar and his people don't get on." It would seem so.

The organ of the Vatican, the *Osservatore Romano*, has "issued to the world" a statement on peace and war. It seems that the Holy See "expresses a wish for a peaceful solution of the Italo-Abyssinian War." Such a momentous pronouncement coming, as it were, direct from the Pope's mouth, should irresistibly prove to the world that the "Holy Father" wants peace; and this desire for peace should not only prove how all Catholics want peace, but also that the Roman Catholic Church almost alone actually expresses this desire. It is all so very beautiful, and only God's own Church could have put forward the plea in such a lovely way.

We have no doubt, indeed, that if Abyssinia is finally compelled to accept the terms imposed on her by Italy, the Pope will point out how ardently he always has wished for peace; and he will order thanks to be given to "Our Lord" for helping him to bring it about. And it is quite probable that Mussolini will attend the service and piously grovel with the other believers. War and religion have, during the centuries, been almost inseparable.

But it is not only in the way they talk about peace that Roman priests show an almost undisguised impudence. It seems that more and more they are protesting that other Christian priests are not "Catholics," and are holding meetings to prove to the misguided Anglos, for instance, that they are not, and never have been, in the "Apostolic succession." That stout old convert, Mr. G. K. Chesterton, and Fr. Woodlock, have recently held a meeting at Letchworth Garden City, in which they gave Protestants—well, we were nearly saying Hell, for pretending that they were genuine priests of Christ. As a matter of fact, any informed Freethinker could make mincemeat of the Roman Catholic claims as to "Apostolic Succession." The only proof they can offer is saying it and one can prove anything that way.

One of the things attributed to King George V. was his fondness for the Bible as a daily companion. This may have been no nearer the actual truth than the once famous remark put into Queen Victoria's mouth as to the Bible being the source of England's greatness. If

either story were true we should feel much like the Scottish Sabbatarian did when he was reminded that Jesus walked in the fields on Sunday. "Well, mebbe he did, but I dinna think the mair on him for doin' it." Anyway, the papers for March 20 say that King George's own personal Bible, presented to him over twenty-five years ago, "one of his most valuable possessions," and which he read every day, is now on exhibit in the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The Bible, we are told, "is in a perfect state of preservation." As a book-collector and book-lover, we are very interested in a book which after twenty years of use is still in a state of perfect preservation. Still, Kings, to very many people, are surrounded with an atmosphere of the miraculous.

Censorship is not confined to Catholic Ireland. In Ulster, the authorities have banned Mr. D. C. Somerville's work on Ireland, forming part III. of *Bell's Modern School Histories*. The grounds for its banning are that "the allusions to the Irish and Ulster question may be considered too partial toward a certain section of Irishmen, and not as sympathetic to our point of view in Ulster as we should like." It is not, therefore, a question as to whether Mr. Somerville is right or wrong. The book does not suit some of the officials in the Ministry of Education, and therefore nobody else ought to read it. This is exactly the kind of censorship which was at first put in force by the Roman Church, and which is now being adopted by all the Dictators in Europe, and is even permeating the so-called free Protestant States. "We shall only allow you to read what we think you ought to read"—this is the literary censorship which "authorities" would like to enforce even in places where there are no dictatorships. Could anything, to a lover of liberty, speak more eloquently of the way in which "free" peoples calmly allow themselves to be bound in fetters?

Another delightful sect has arisen among Protestants. They call themselves "Ironsides," and in Liverpool, the other Sunday, fifty of them marched into a church at St. Helens "equipped with hymn sheets, from which they began to sing as soon as the clergy and choir entered. They continued to roar them over and over again, until the service, which the vicar conducted, in spite of all the noise, was brought to a close." What a beautiful picture this must have been—the vicar doing his best to carry on "a sung Eucharist of the simplest character" in the name of the eaten Christ, and the valiant Ironsides protesting against God forming a meal, by bawling hymns in his honour. What a happy religion Christianity is!

Jolly Mr. Chesterton seems to get angrier and angrier with those of us who attack the Catholic Church. In one of his latest effusions he says that "the champion set up to attack Catholicism was once some great advocate like Voltaire or Huxley; and is now little more than a sort of noisy official; a pompous preposterous sort of Sergeant Buzfuz living on a legal fiction, and merely pretending to cross-examine to escape from being cross-examined." The idea of any modern Freethinker trying to escape from being "cross-examined" by a Catholic ought to strike anyone with a sense of humour as being distinctly and uproariously funny. For—as both Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloe know—it is almost impossible to get a representative Roman Catholic into the arena for a debate with a Freethinker. Long experience has made this type of believer far too wary. As he would pathetically protest, nothing can be gained from such a debate. And he full well knows why.

It is Dr. Inge and his articles in the *Evening Standard* which arouse Mr. Chesterton's ire. One might disagree with much the late Dean of St. Paul's says. But there is one thing he does know well, and that is Roman Catholicism. And it is good to find that a journal with the circulation of the *Evening Standard* does not hesitate to allow Dr. Inge full play for his scathing attacks on the silly superstition, the unbounded credulity, and infantile nonsense which distinguish the "holy" Church. No wonder Mr. Chesterton gets angrier and angrier.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A.W.—The Trustees of the National Secular Society gratefully acknowledge the receipt of £50 for the general purposes of the Society.

FOR Distributing and Advertising the *Freethinker*.—J. Petersen, 19s.; W. Collins, 10s.

H. T. BRITTON.—Very pleased to learn you are making a good recovery to complete health.

J. STURMER.—Very glad to hear from such old readers of the *Freethinker*. We hope to continue to deserve your appreciation. Always pleased to receive cuttings.

T. H. PERKINS.—Mr. Cohen is glad to have your sympathetic note. Literature has been sent you.

H. RANWELL (Wellington, New Zealand).—Whether Mr. Cohen deserves such highly termed appreciation or not he is gratified to earn such golden opinions.

C.M.—It is almost impossible for a man to write well on any subject unless he is acquainted with the literature concerning it. He may still write foolishness, but he will not be so ready to claim the foolishness as his own. Perhaps if you put this to your clerical friend he may realize that stupid as is his argument, it is a very ancient one, and has been dealt with by Freethinkers over and over again.

W. COLLINS.—We always have the future of the *Freethinker* in mind, and our recent illness has not tended to make us think less on the subject. We may write something on the matter in the course of a week or two. This year we celebrate our coming of age as, officially, editor of the paper (1915-1936) and nothing would please us better as a birthday present than a very substantial increase in the circulation of the oldest Freethought paper in Europe. In this our friends can help very materially.

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

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## Sugar Plums

Some Christian blackguard, whose only indication of decency is that he gives neither name nor address, writes stating that the *Freethinker* was once prosecuted for blasphemy. A lie of this kind might be costly to one who made it, if name and address were given. This is followed by a warning that if we are not careful we also may be subjected to a term of imprisonment, and that specimens of the *Freethinker* had been sent to the public prosecutor, but the latter had decided that he did not wish to advertise the paper. We can only think of this as one more lie, and have no hesitation in saying, that we do not believe the public prosecutor was ever foolish enough to make such a statement, or that if he did he must have been a Christian of the same kidney as the anonymous liar with whom we are dealing.

Another letter, received about the same time as the one just noted, we believe will be read with greater pleasure by most. It is from Mr. Jack Lindsay, whose reputation in the world of English literature stands deservedly high. Writing to Mr. Cohen, concerning some of his books, he says:—

The vigorous clarity of your style would have won lots of praise from the critics of our literature if it hadn't been directed to worthy ends. If it defended some form of rottenness, social or imperial, you would be widely acclaimed. As you merely uphold truth, justice and decency, you must expect a lot of boycotting.

We appreciate Mr. Lindsay's praise, but we believe we can say with absolute truthfulness that we never con-

sidered either profit or praise in anything we have written. We wrote as we thought, and there was an end of it. But it has brought the respect of many worthy men and women in all parts of the world, and their thanks have been much appreciated. The best of men do not get all the thanks they deserve, but we flatter ourselves that no one ever gained the respect of worthy men and women unless he deserved it.

There was a good attendance at Conway Hall on March 19, when the Horace Seal Memorial Conference was held on the Relation of the State to Religion. It had been Mr. Cohen's intention to speak at this Conference, but his illness unfortunately rendered this impossible. Mrs. Seaton Tiedeman, who was in the chair, read a letter from Mr. Cohen on the subject of the meeting which was well received. Other speakers who were unable to be present were Lord Snell and Mrs. Janet Chance. Four speeches were made from the platform by Mr. A. W. Howell Smith, Rev. Jas Barr, M.P., Professor H. Levy, and Mr. Ernest Thurtle, M.P., followed by remarks by any member of the audience who felt disposed to do so. Among those who took advantage of this was Mr. A. Bradlaugh Bonner and Miss Nellie Freeman, Secretary of the Secular Education League. The question of religious teaching in State schools loomed large in all the speeches, and the Secular Solution was consistently advocated as the only just and practical solution. Miss Freeman appealed for support for the Secular Education League, advice which we commend to the attention of all readers of this paper. The speeches are reprinted by the Ethical Union, under whose auspices the meeting was held. They can be obtained on application to the Ethical Union, 12 Palmer Street, London, S.W.1, for 2½d. in stamps.

Mr. E. C. Saphin had a very full house at the Secular Hall, Leicester, on Sunday last, to listen to his lecture on "The Stupidities of Jesus." We note the title of the lecture aroused some very strong opposition in the city. This came, apparently, from a Catholic priest who complained to the Lord Mayor asking for interference. The ground of the Catholic priest's objection was that "Our Lord is acknowledged as having done all things well."

Perhaps one day this extremely bigoted priest may realize that all people do not agree that "Jesus did all things well." And it is a piece of impertinence for anyone to ask for forcible prevention of a view that is made current in thousands of books and speeches. We presume that if the title of the lecture had been "Was Jesus a Wise Man?" and then the substance of the lecture had followed, no objection would have been raised. It is evidently either honesty of speech or the putting before the public of a view held by very large numbers of people that lies at the root of the objection to the lecture.

Leicester is a city which boasts of a constant and honourable tradition concerning liberty of thought and speech, and we have no fear of it failing to live up to its reputation.

The *Methodist Recorder* doesn't like Upton Sinclair's devastating attack on the sordid side of Christian Commercialism in his book, *The Profits of Religion*. Of course there is no answer, so the usual abuse appears. It is "lurid, hysterical, unbalanced, and sensational." We advise Methodists (and Freethinkers) to read the book for themselves, or better still for English readers, to get Alan Handsacre's book on the same subject. Both works await criticism; they have both been often enough abused.

Birmingham saints will have another opportunity of hearing Mr. G. Bedborough to-day (Sunday) when he speaks for the local N.S.S. Branch in the Shakespeare Room, Edmund Street, on "Is the Bible a Wise Guide." The subject, and the speaker's personality, should make this an excellent opportunity for introducing orthodox friends to a Freethought meeting, and we have no doubt members of the Branch will take full advantage. The lecture begins at 7.30 p.m.



After a very successful winter season the Glasgow Branch will hold a Grand Dance in the Plaza Ball Room, Eglinton Toll, on Thursday evening, April 2. There will be dancing from 8 until 11.30. Tickets at 3s. includes tea, and may be obtained from the local Secretary, Mrs. M. Whitefield, 351 Castlemilk Road, Glasgow, S.4.

The new Branch of the N.S.S. at Leeds is getting down to work right away. A lecture is to be held in the Trades Hall, Upper Fountain Street, Leeds, at 8 p.m., to-day (Sunday). Members of the Branch are, of course, expected to be present, and to bring friends, and all others interested are invited to attend or get in touch with the local Secretary, Mr. M. Feldman, 58 Meanwood Road, Leeds.

The Annual General Meeting of the Manchester Branch will be held on Sunday, April 5, at 3.0 p.m., in the Picture House, Market Street, Manchester. Accounts and Reports will be presented, Officers and Committee will be elected for the ensuing year, and other business transacted. A good muster of members is desired, and we hope all will make a note of the date.

## Rationalism contra Mundum

### I.

WE have been admonished in this journal, in dealing with high and recondite themes, to be exact in our use of words. Excellent counsel. But the difficulty arises also from the limitations and confusions of language as an instrument of thought in treating of matters lying beyond everyday needs and circumstance. This applies in degree to the term "Rationalism." While it has a certain accepted connotation with the unorthodox, it is sometimes employed by the orthodox to define a particular and limited doctrine in religious disputation. Yet the word itself is a valuable one, and for the purpose of the present survey of first principles, it is desirable to give one's own meaning which accords with that of our leading Dictionary. Rational=endowed with reason, exercising or able to exercise one's reason in a proper manner, having sound judgment, sensible, sane, not foolish or extravagant. And reason=that intellectual power and faculty (usually regarded as characteristic of mankind, but sometimes also attributed to the lower animals) which is ordinarily employed in adapting thought or action to some end, the judging principle of the human mind in the process of thinking. Then what is distinguished as "logic" enters into the process of thinking and its expression. Logic is simply the science and art of consistent reasoning from premiss to conclusion as a necessary inference or natural consequence in the form of an argument. In the logic of action, it is a natural sequence of events or inevitably of cause and effect. Then in the presentation and elucidation of any complex proposition other attributes beyond reason enter in due proportion; imagination, observation, intuition or insight, not to mention matters of fact.

These things imply their opposite, the non-rational and unreason in contra-distinction. That human judgment is liable to err, and that reason and logic are related to the manner of their exercise. There is no absolute logic or reason by which the truth of any contention can be tested and verified. This further depends on a reliable or authoritative standard of evidence, credibility, and the touch-stone of experience. So rationality may be taken to cover conclusions reached by a mode of dialectic consistent with these criteria. This applies to all human and social interests, equally with those of religion, speculation and cosmic investigation. And "religion" is here interpreted in its historic sense as connected with

human beliefs about Life and our World; *religens*=to gather or consider.

With this exordium, to plunge in *medias res*, there is a definition of Rationalism which is of import to our purpose both in itself and from its origin. It is "the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason, and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority."<sup>1</sup> This, too, suggests the presence of an entity or absolute reason, and raises afresh the question of intellectual authority. The associations of the term "philosophy" also call for clarification. Its Greek derivative implies the love and pursuit of Wisdom and links with dialectic. Here it has a peculiar connexion with the fantasies of Plato, which still command admiration in academic circles; and, in another way, with the system of his pupil, Aristotle. In a different sense, it denotes Greek speculation about the same period in physical causality, as distinct from supernatural seemings. Again, it embraces the exposition of notions deriving from the primal beliefs of mankind about mind, soul, God, matter; derived that is from a time of nescience, and expanded later into theologies like those of Christianity or Islam. So we get attempts to square antique philosophic speculation with religious dogma based on sacred scripture and tradition, mainly that of Judaism, known in European thought as the scholastic philosophy:—

At the beginning of the scholastic period philosophic thought had not yet been brought into a relation of complete vassalage to Church doctrine. Scotus Erigena [ninth century] in particular affirmed rather the identity of true religion with true philosophy than the subordination of the latter to the former . . . in accordance with the principles of the (Dionysian and Neo-Platonic) philosophy which he adopted . . . In the second division of the scholastic period (from the middle of the thirteenth century on) the conformity of the reconstructed Aristotelian philosophy with the faith of the Church appears as firmly settled, yet limited from the beginning, by the fact that the specifically Christian dogmas (the Trinity, incarnation, resurrection of the body, etc.) were excepted in this connexion as undemonstrable by reason. . . . The vassalage of philosophy consisted in the fact that an impassable limit was fixed for the freedom of philosophizing in the dogmas of the Church, that the test of truth and falsehood in matters common to philosophy and theology was not sought in observation and in thought itself but in the doctrines of the Church; and that accordingly the Aristotelian doctrine (partly in its theological portion with reference to the eternity of the world, and partly in its psychology—the *nous* as related to the inferior parts of the Soul) was modified by the most eminent scholastics, while those dogmas which were incapable of philosophical demonstration or confirmation were not allowed to be made the subjects of philosophical discussion."<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless these dogmas derive from certain premises supported by specious contentions, of which more in the sequel.

A revival of free inquiry followed the removal of obstructive barriers of medievalism through struggles and changes from the sixteenth century onwards. The forms of thought more usually classed as philosophic resumed their concern with that cycle of abstract interests which ever returns on itself; with "epistemology," what do we know, and how do we know it? Is "matter" a reality or a figment of "mind"? etc. Meanwhile from the founding of the Royal Society of London in 1663 the pursuit of natural knowledge, or science, was renewed and continued steadily to our

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of the Rationalist Press Association, Limited.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Philosophy*, by F. Ueberweg.



own day. This pursuit also is alternatively described in the language of the time as natural philosophy. Science (*scientia*=knowledge, properly so-called) is no more than the observation and classification of natural phenomena and causality, in terms that work and are veridical. Its modern pioneers took small account of abstractions, but went on the *assumption* upon which the whole ordinary business of living is conducted. This is the reality of the external world or universe, the validity of sense-perception, observation and inference for all normal persons. This study incited new considerations of the nature of mind as related to brain structure and function—an attitude little adopted in its anterior analysis; and a concern which is at the root of all sound psychology—as such, and our criterion of knowledge and judgment.<sup>3</sup> "Our sensations depend upon a previous affection of the organs of sensation, and this affection depends on the existence of intrinsically real external objects." Such objects—sun, moon, stars, rocks, tides, flora, fauna, what not, are subject matter for "Science." Philosophy then is a hybrid term covering a variety of notions and theories, and depends for its purport quite on the sense attached thereto. As "metaphysic" (beyond physical experience) it deals in other words with the simulacra of theology. With scientific advance it has been taken to imply a revisional or critical office here as a "science of principles." This meaning best accords with a literal view of rationalism; not so much an attempted "system" as a body of general conclusions on the problem of existence harmonious with advancing knowledge. For as Ueberweg puts it:—

The innermost soul of the whole process of development in modern philosophy is not a mere immanent dialectic of speculative principles, but is rather the struggle between religious convictions, handed down from the past and deeply-rooted in the modern mind and heart, and the scientific results of modern investigations in the fields of nature and mind, together with the attempt to reconcile both.

This touches the crux of the matter before us. To reach a defined appraisalment herein, it is necessary further to view related aspects of traditional beliefs.

AUSTEN VERNEY.

<sup>3</sup> "The human soul, as we medical men know it, depends solely on the brain: the brain must be alive; it must be supplied with energy; it must transform that energy to live, think, feel and be conscious."—*Sir A. Keith*. "The only source of our knowledge of consciousness is that faculty itself; subject and object are one and the same in it; the perceptive subject mirrors itself in its own inner nature, which is to be the object of our inquiry. Thus we can never have a complete objective certainty of the consciousness of others; we can only proceed by a comparison of their psychic condition with our own. As long as this comparison is restricted to normal people we are justified in drawing certain conclusions as to their consciousness the validity of which is unchallenged."—*E. Haeckel*.

#### HUMANITY AND WAR

Here is how the *Times* correspondent pictured the Battle of Sedan:—

Let your readers fancy masses of coloured rags glued together with blood and brains, and pinned into strange shapes by fragments of bones. Let them conceive men's bodies without heads, legs without bodies, heaps of human entrails attached to red and blue cloth, and disembowelled corpses in uniform, bodies lying about in all attitudes, and skulls shattered, faces blown off, hips smashed, bones, flesh, and gay clothing all pounded together as if brayed in a mortar, extending for miles, not very thick in any one place, but recurring perpetually for weary hours; and then they cannot, with the most vivid imagination, come up to the sickening reality of that butchery!

Quoted by J. M. ROBERTSON,  
in "*Patriotism and Empire*," p. 129.

## The Witch Mania

### XI.

It is a fact that throughout definite periods, primitive man worshipped many strange gods; and the most popular of these deities almost invariably wore horns. Horned gods are found in Babylonian remains as well as in Egypt, Assyria and India. Even the Divine Lamb in the Book of Revelation had seven horns. In Egypt, both Osiris and Amon were decorated with horns.

There can be no doubt that these horns symbolized fertility. Certainly the sacred bull worshipped in Egypt represented the fertilizing power of sex. The cornucopia, the well-filled horn of plenty, probably derives in some way from Apis, as the bull was called in Egypt. And in the pictures which are painted all over the ancient remains of the great dynasties will be often seen Amon, as the divine father, wearing the same appendages.

The Minoan bull, the Minotaur of Crete, is shown with a bull's head and horns and a human body. The Greek deity Dionysos is another horned god. Both in Gaul and Scandinavia records have been found by the Romans of similar deities; and Miss Murray, in her valuable work the *God of the Witches*, points out:—

It is highly improbable that the cult of the Horned God should have died out in South Western Europe in Neolithic times, and have remained unknown through the Bronze and Iron ages, only to be revived before the arrival of the Romans. It is more logical to suppose that the worship continued through the unrecorded centuries, and lasted on as one of the principal Gaulish cults till within the Christian era. Such a cult must have had a strong hold on the worshippers, and among the illiterate, and in the less accessible parts of the country it would linger for many centuries after a new religion had been accepted elsewhere.

That religious beliefs, no matter how stupid they may appear to the more enlightened, can linger on for centuries, can be seen in the persistent way some of the tenets of Christianity are still being upheld, not merely by the illiterate, but by the educated. Nothing that the worshippers of the Horned God believed in so thoroughly (a devotion we laugh at heartily in these days), could possibly be sillier than a Romish priest solemnly uttering a magical incantation over a wafer of bread, and believing then it had changed into the actual body of Jesus—who, after all was only a variation of the Horned God.

That some of the old religious beliefs and rites were tenaciously clung to by the new converts to Christianity is, of course, admitted even by the orthodox. The early missionaries to these shores, for example, found often that the Saxon inhabitants reverted to the old faiths—and, curiously enough, even now, there is a body of Germans who would like to dethrone Christianity in Germany and substitute grand old German gods like Wodin, for Christ. We are apt to forget that the flight of time is in reality a long process. Five or six centuries can be dealt with in a page, or even less, by our historians. But in reality generations can come and go, living their lives in the faith of their fathers, undisturbed by other beliefs, providing, of course, terrorism is not resorted to in order to bring about conversion. In the old days travelling was not easy. People lived and died in the heart of the country far away from the anxious times which often beset those who lived in the more crowded towns. Is it not a fact that, though Jane



Austen was actually writing during the troublous era caused by the rise of Napoleon, in which England played so great a part, there is hardly a hint of it given in her famous novels?

As Miss Murray rightly points out, Christianity was more or less successfully resisted for many centuries after the period our histories tell us that the missionaries introduced it. "Until the Norman conquest," she says, "the Christianity of England was the very thinnest veneer over an underlying Paganism; the previous centuries of Christian archbishops and bishops had not succeeded in doing more than wrest an outward conformity from the rulers and chiefs, while the people and many of the so-called Christian priests remained in unabated heathenism." One might go even a little further. It is not at all certain that the tales of Britain's conversion in the early priestly histories are entirely true. The truth may well be that a horde of the filthy monks who had infested Europe for centuries, found a new haven of rest in England. They gradually made their way here, built churches and monasteries, were allowed more or less to settle down by the chiefs and so gradually "converted" this country.

Naturally the pagan god was, in the eyes of Christians, the "Devil." The more the Christians despised the heathen deity, the more were his special characteristics claimed as those belonging exclusively to the Evil One. A horned being with a tail is recognized now everywhere as the Devil, whereas he was certainly a God to many generations of people.

The curious thing is that many of the witches refused to recognize in him anything but a God. He was not the Devil to them. The evidence on this point is quite clear—though, once again, I must insist that a good deal of it comes through Christian courts, inscribed by Christian writers, and wrung from the "witches" very often by infamous torture.

The descriptions of the "Devil" given by the witches coincide remarkably with the pictures drawn by primitive artists of the Horned God; and yet only three hundred years ago, at the witches' assemblies, "a similar worship of the heathen god was still practised in the British Isles," says Miss Murray. But, in reality, was it? Even on her own showing, the "Devil" was a man who, to satisfy his lascivious nature, imposed on the women. He certainly insisted on certain rites and ceremonies, rules and regulations obviously necessary for his purpose. The ancient "heathens" must have believed "en masse" their elaborate rituals at which whole populations assisted. The assemblies of witches were perhaps, no more than a few secret societies, certainly practising some of the old formulas, but there was actually no wholesale belief. The Church magnified every opposition, of course, and did its best to suppress everything inimical to its own interests. That the people often resented this can be seen, for example, by the stories and ballads devoted to Robin Hood. Robin was always on the side of the poor people, and he had a special antipathy to abbots and priors. It was only natural that his death was caused by the treachery of a prioress, and that it was mourned by all the people who knew him. Miss Murray thinks that there must be some connexion between Robin Hood and Robin Goodfellow—the name given to Puck; and Robin, anyhow, was the name often given to the Devil by the witches. The old ballads of the common people, as well as the folk-lore of the country-side must enshrine some curious details of ancient beliefs. Their continued scientific study will, perhaps, throw more than a flood of light on the origins of most religions.

There is one point, however, strongly emphasized by the study of the persistence of primitive beliefs, and that is, the way in which the occult still survives and thrives even among the most intelligent. No amount of scientific study has driven out the idea that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy—meaning, of course, by the people who use the now hackneyed saying, the occult, or occult happenings. We have *intelligentsia* who believe in fairies, real six-inch high beings in diaphanous draperies, gently flitting about from flower to flower. The whole idea of fairy people is really a survival of some small race which persisted here and there in Europe (much like the Gypsies now-a-days) and who, because perhaps of their rejection of Christianity, were hated by believers, and who eventually died out as the centuries passed.

We have all the nonsense of the influence of the planets at birth largely sought for by millions and thoroughly believed in—"horoscopes" as they are called, provided and paid for by our great national journals for the edification of their readers. Societies are constantly being formed and have no difficulty in flourishing, of believers in "spiritualism," one of the most stupendous frauds of modern times. And books on divination, numerology and kindred arts sell in thousands every year. In most of these things Christianity sees rivals, but it has no power, or very little power, now-a-days, to suppress them. Three centuries ago, however, it did what it could; and the terrible torture and burnings of witches and wizards blacken the pages of history. The modern believers in the occult can thank their "lucky stars" they are not living in the glorious days of true Christianity, when that heaven-made religion would brook no rival. It is only fair to say, however, that the palmists, mediums, and other soothsayers, who regularly appear—in my opinion, often unjustly—in our courts, and have to pay heavy fines, look upon themselves as martyrs quite as much as the poor women who were caught and executed as witches in the past.

It is curious to find how all religions hate a rival—much in the same way as one economic system in these strenuous times, hates another economic system. The Christian miracle-monger hated the Satanic magic-monger. One is done in the name of the Devil; the other in the name of the Lord. To the rank outsider, like the genuine Freethinker, priest or magician, God or Devil, Church or Sabbath, seem much the same. They are all survivals of ancient fears and stupid beliefs fostered by a priesthood which batters on the ignorance and credulity of the mass of the people. Here and there have come the true Saviours—those men and women who have boldly denounced the rapacity and rascality of the "priest" by whatever name he is called—who have shown his origin and exposed his pretensions. It took centuries to stop the cruelties practised on heretics and "witches." It may take centuries before the mass of people are converted to right-thinking on "religion" and on the "occult." It is great work and worth the doing; for it is by free thought, by the free expression of opinion that truth can be substituted for error and mankind saved.

H. CUTNER.

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In all ages, hypocrites, called Priests, have put crowns upon the heads of thieves, called Kings.—*Ingersoll*.

Marriage under Christian rule, was viewed in its coarsest and most degraded form. The notion of its impurity took many forms and exercised for some centuries an extremely wide influence over the Church.—*Lecky*.



## Things Worth Knowing\*

XXXIV.

### MIND IN SOCIETY

MAN is distinguished from the animals above all things by his power of learning. Whereas the behaviour of animals, even of the higher ones, consists almost entirely of purely instinctive actions, innate modes of response to a limited number of situations; man has an indefinitely great capacity for acquiring new modes of response, and so of adapting himself in new and more complex ways to an almost indefinite variety of situations. And his new mental acquisitions are not made only by the slow process of adaptation in the light of his own individual experience of the consequences of behaviour of this and of that kind; as are most of the few acquisitions of the animals. By far the greater part of the mental stock-in-trade by which his behaviour is guided is acquired from his fellow men; it represents the accumulated experience of all the foregoing generations of his race and nation. Man's life in society, together with the great plasticity of his mind, its great capacity for new adaptations, secures him this enormous advantage; the two things are necessarily correlated. Without the plasticity of mind, his life in society would benefit him relatively little. Many animals that lead a social life in large herds or flocks are not superior, but rather inferior, in mental power to animals that lead a more solitary life; and indeed this seems to be generally true, as we see on comparing the herbivorous gregarious animals with the solitary carnivores that prey upon them. The social life of such animals rendering individuals less necessary for protection and escape from danger, tends actually against mental development.

On the other hand, man's great plastic brain would be of comparatively little use to him if he lived a solitary unsocial life. His great brain is there to enable him to assimilate and make use of the accumulated experience, the sum of knowledge and morality, which is traditional in the society into which he is born a member; that is to say, the development of social life, which depended so much upon language and for the forwarding of which language came into existence, must have gone hand in hand with the development of the great brain, which enables full advantage to be secured from social co-operation, and which, specially renders possible the accumulation of knowledge, belief and traditional sentiment.

Now this traditional stock of knowledge and morality has been very slowly accumulated, bit by bit; and every bit, every least new addition to it, has been a difficult acquisition, due in the first instance to some spontaneous variation of some individual's mental structure from the ancestral type of mental structure. That is to say, throughout the evolution of civilization, progress of every kind, increase of knowledge or improvement of morality, has been due to the birth of more or less exceptional individuals, individuals varying ever so slightly from the ancestral type and capable, owing to this variation, of making some new and original adaptation of action, and of perceiving some previously undiscovered relation between things.

. . . Favourable spontaneous variations do not, as with the animals, render possible mental evolution

merely by conducing to the survival of, and the perpetuation of the qualities of, those individuals in whom the variations occur. They may do this or they may not; but in addition and more importantly, they contribute to the stock of traditional knowledge and morality, and so raise the social group as a whole in the scale of civilization; they render it more capable of successfully contending against other groups and against the adverse influence of the physical environment; and they promote the solidarity of the group by adding to its stock of common tradition, thus the acquisition of each member benefits the groups as a whole and all its members, quite apart from any philanthropic purpose or intention of producing such a result.

. . . Each variety of the human species, each race considered as a succession of individuals having certain innate mental qualities, has been evolved, then, not merely under the influence of the physical environment, like the animal species, but also and to an ever-increasing extent under the influence of the social environment. The social environment we regard as consisting of two parts, namely, the social organization and the body of social tradition; for these, though interdependent and constantly interacting, may yet with advantage be kept apart in thought. We must, then, bear constantly in mind the fact that man creates for himself an environment which becomes ever more complex and influential, overshadowing more and more in importance the physical environment.

*The Group Mind,*  
by W. McDUGAL, pp. 209-12.

### "Preconceived Perfection"

THE other day I came across the following passage among my notes, but have no record of the author: "We have had more than ample proof that inner consciousness is the most unreliable of all sources of objective knowledge." We may include in this supposititious source all intuition, divination, supernatural inspiration, revelation, and the like, together with religious or other occult "experience." On the same day I re-read a chapter in *The Rhythms of Life*, by Dr. Fraser-Harris, where, under the title quoted at the head of this article, a number of illustrations of the truth of the statement referred to are given from the history of science.

It is hardly necessary to say that it is in the domain of religion that the most striking examples of non-rational mentation occur, mentation, that is to say, which does not involve conscious reasoning and rational apprehension, based on real experience. This is well illustrated by the numerous and gross errors included in orthodox Christianity; and the resistance to their correction equally well illustrates religious obscurantism.

Dr. Fraser-Harris does not mention the most comprehensive of them all, viz., the notion of supernatural creation of the world as a whole, and its correction in the face of tremendous opposition, which has not yet come to an end; though several astronomical points, following from the notion of (perfect) creation are given.

It was natural enough that the earlier Greeks, about 2,500 years ago, should think that the celestial bodies were perfect, that the circle was a perfect figure, and therefore that the planets moved in circular paths. And this error was fixed for some fourteen centuries in the Ptolemaic system. Owing to the opposition of the Church to all that clashed with the Bible, together with the general medieval atmosphere of ignorance and superstition, there was much resistance to the true conclusion that the bodies in question move in elliptical orbits. Galileo found similar difficulty with the "perfection" idea. He found spots on the sun, which were plainly visible through his telescope; and this, in conjunction with his rediscovery of the movement of the earth round the sun, brought upon him the wrath of the ecclesiasts. Also, as is well known, the work in which Copernicus

\* 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.



proved that the earth is not the centre of the universe was put on the *Index*; and in 1600 Bruno was burnt for his modern, rational, scientific-philosophic teachings, including the plurality of worlds or planets.

The flatness of the earth, including the denial of the existence of the antipodes, is not mentioned. These things, which were laboriously taught by early pseudo-scientific Christians, and firmly held during the Middle Ages, died very hard; indeed there are with us still a few "flat-earthists" (as well as a few astrologers). In an interesting passage Lecky relates the following episode in his *History of Rationalism*: "Thus, when in the middle of the eighth century an Irish saint, named St. Virgilius, who was one of the very few men who then cultivated profane sciences, ventured in Bavaria to assert the existence of the Antipodes, the whole religious world was thrown into a paroxysm of indignation, St. Boniface leading the attack, and Pope Zachary, at least for a time, encouraging it."

Here again the furore seems to be associated with the idea of "perfection." A nice parallelogram, as described by Cosmas, with people on one side only, so that as suggested by an early Christian anti-antipodist) all could see the Lord descending to the earth on the Day of Judgment, seemed a beautiful arrangement, and one not to be lightly called in question.

In the biological domain there are many examples. Harvey, the famous discoverer of the circulation of the blood, was intensely criticized, though, so far as I can learn, not attacked by the Church, for his enormously important addition to knowledge. The opposition, however, was doubtless due to a deduction from the notion of creation, viz., the perfection of objective things. Dr. Caspar Hoffman said that Harvey had "impeached Nature of folly and error," imputing to her "the character of a most clumsy and inefficient artificer in suffering the blood to become recrudescant, and making it return again and again to the heart." Stenson had a similar experience when he announced his discovery that the heart was a muscle. Without giving details, our author states, "the mere suggestion was rank impiety, and Stenson was duly censured for such irreverence."

The strangling power of preconceived ideas is exemplified by the hindrance to Moslem medical investigation due to the pronouncement of the Koran, that to touch a dead body made the toucher ceremonially unclean. This embargo also applied to the Jews, so that during the Middle Ages both sets of doctors could only repeat the anatomical statements of Greek and Roman writers.

An interesting case is that of Tagliacozzi, who in the sixteenth century practised plastic surgery, repairing the noses, ears and lips which in those days of almost perpetual wars and duelling were damaged in large numbers. Scientific men admired his work. But others denounced him for his impiety in daring to alter the human countenance, "made in the image of God." And after he had been dead many years his bones were dug up and scattered by order of the ecclesiastical authorities!

Of more recent cases the following may be mentioned: A Rev. Dr. Rowley has perpetuated his name by opposing vaccination: "Small-pox is a visitation from God, but cow-pox is produced by presumptuous man. The former is what Heaven has ordained, the latter is a daring violation of our holy religion." When Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had her infant vaccinated a chaplain (unnamed) represented to her that this was an unchristian operation, and therefore that it could only succeed with infidels! Gall, of phrenological fame, was said to have outraged religion by teaching that mental and moral qualities had their physical basis in the brain. The use of anaesthetics in childbirth was strongly opposed, Simpson being vilified for this sacrilegious and unscriptural practice. His attention was drawn to the sacred edict, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children." But as (we are told) the Devil can quote Scripture for his purpose, so Simpson drew attention to the statement in the same book that "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam," while "he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh thereof," thus producing (if not scientifically) general anaesthesia before performing the operation.

J. REEVES.

## Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

### THE RELIGIOUS PROSECUTIONS (ABOLITION) BILL.

SIR.—Following an editorial suggestion, I wrote my local M.P., inviting his support for the above Bill. I enclosed some literature on the Blasphemy Laws, and also advertising the Freethought cause at large. It appears an excellent opportunity to pursue both objects in this way, whatever the fortune of the Bill itself; and to indicate to Parliament that the "saints" are a force in the land.

Freethinkers residing abroad could also approach the Leader of the House requesting facilities for the Bill's consideration; so demonstrating a world-wide interest in, and demand for, the removal of such laws from our national polity.

A.V.

## 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. F. P. Corrigan, President South London Branch—A Lecture.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.): 11.0, John Katz, B.A.—"The Philosopher as Architect of Civilization."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): 8.0, Monday, March 30, Mr. A. D. McLaren—"Is there any Evidence for Telepathy?"

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10): 7.30, H. Stewart Wishart—"Jesus Christ—Fact or Fable?"

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Edward Gee—"What is Roman Catholic Truth?"

### COUNTRY

#### OUTDOOR.

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Level): 8.0, Saturday, March 28, Mr. L. A. Miles—"The Druids and their Cult."

#### INDOOR

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Cobden Hall, Cort Street, Blackburn): 7.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Does the N.S.S. Justify its Existence?"

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, Birmingham): 7.30, Mr. G. Bedborough—"Is the Bible a Wise Guide?"

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Tavern Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford): 7.15, Annual General Meeting.

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (188 Elm Grove, Brighton): 3.0, Branch Meeting. Prospective members are invited.

BRIGHTON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Institute, 164 Elm Grove, Brighton): 7.30, Mr. L. A. Miles—"Has Christianity Improved Humanity?" With Open Discussion.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Discussion.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Joseph McCabe—"The Menace of Roman Catholicism."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool): 7.0, J. V. Shortt (Liverpool)—A Lecture.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street, Sunderland): 7.0, Mr. A. Flanders—A Lecture.



## RATIONALIST EVALUATIONS AND THE TRUE DIRECTION OF CIVILIZATION

By AUSTEN VERNEY.

"Conscious Will directed towards a defined goal is the very essence of the philosophy we are out to promote" (p. 50) is a declaration that may repel those who believe that philosophy, though much concerned with conscious will, should fight shy of "a defined goal." But this exposition of humanist rationalism is very valuable as an effective expression of the intellectual and moral liberation which is in many quarters to-day dismissed so lightly as nineteenth-century "bunk."—*Philosophy: The Journal of the British Institute of Philosophy.*

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The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of enquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularization of the State, etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

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