

# THE FREETHINKER

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

## Views and Opinions

### *Whoso would be a Liar*

FROM *Delius as I Knew Him* by Mr. Eric Fenby:—

Already as a youth, when he left Bradford, Delius was at heart a Pagan. A young mind such as his, that had been nurtured on detective stories and penny dreadfuls, was not likely to forget that incident, which he had witnessed when Bradlaugh had stood with his watch in his hand, calling on his creator to strike him dead within two minutes, if he existed. Delius had never forgotten that two minutes, it had made a lasting impression on him.

And the following comment by Mr. Compton Mackenzie, editor of the *Gramophone*:—

No wonder. The petty and presumptuous egotism of Bradlaugh struck a responsive chord in Delius, whose own egotism would have confidently exacted as signal a mark of individual attention from Almighty God without a fleeting suspicion of the enormity of the request.

Lying is not the oldest exhibition of human ingenuity, but it is a very ancient one. In *Trial by Jury*, W. S. Gilbert makes the defendant in a breach of promise case plead that he is only following the example of nature. The moon has its phases, and the months do not resemble each other. The wind veers from point to point, and the weather is constantly changing. So in turning from one lady to another the inconstant swain was only imitating nature. One must admit that nature is not averse to a lie. Edible insects mimic inedible ones to avoid being eaten. Animals mimic certain aspects of their environment to secure their prey or to avoid destruction. To escape being gobbled up, eggs imitate both the shape and colour of pebbles. Man is a child of nature.

With mankind there are liars of many sorts. There is the Munchausen type of liar who captures us with the wealth of his imagination; and there is the liar of adventures who fascinates because he so cleverly ex-

aggerates possibilities, and one ceases to note where truth ends and the lie begins. The world owes some very brilliant writing and some very agreeable hours to those who have found truth tiresome, and have set forth to create something more entertaining. But if one wishes to take an honoured place in the world of liars, he must possess an active imagination, a sense of fitness in bringing together the different parts of his tale, and, above all he must beware of mistaking the impossible for the wonderful.

\* \* \*

### The Lie Religious

But the worst kind of liar is the religious one. He is common but unconvincing. He mistakes the incredible for the wonderful, and exaggeration for emphasis. His lies seldom indicate a powerful imagination, and he mistakes repetition for emphasis. The antiquity of his tales is unmistakable, and in merely altering names and dates he displays the more clearly their age. The lie of the religious liar is unconvincing, save to another religious liar, who will feel hurt if it does not follow the usual lines. Above all, the religious lie is always saturated with viciousness, whereas the lies of the really great liars are full of good nature and lovely humour. On consideration I feel certain that no religious liar would ever be elected to the membership of "The Ancient and Honourable Order of Qualified Liars." He would be censured for bringing discredit upon so distinguished a profession.

\* \* \*

### The Hand of God

I think most of my readers will be familiar with the substance of the two quotations I have given at the head of these notes. They are not as old as religion, but they are as old as doubts about religion. In essence they are older than Christianity, and the Church took them over with the rest of its stock of mythological tales. Pre-Christian religions had its accounts of men who defied gods, and who were publicly and strikingly punished as a consequence, for in those days the gods looked after their own business. The story of God directly punishing people is to be found in the Bible in many cases, notably in the New Testament in the story of Ananias. Ananias told a lie and the Lord struck him dead. But God did not regularly pursue this policy, perhaps for fear of decimating the ranks of his followers. In the history of the Christian Church God has blinded or killed men for sacrilege, for misusing the Mass, and for other offences against him. In the fight between the Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century God sometimes killed Catholics because they injured Protestants, and sometimes Protestants because they offended Catholics. He appears to have been backing both sides. (In sporting circles this is called "hedging.") Later when little boys ran away from Sunday school and went fishing, he drowned them or



afflicted them with illness. Then when this kind of direct action on the part of God died out, there was still provided the picture of wicked infidels who ran away with wives—not their own—who indulged in riotous enjoyment in public houses, or theatres, and who, while other people went to Church or Chapel, sang songs and generally enjoyed themselves. But these stories lost their vogue. I fancy it must have happened because Christians grew rather envious of the “good time” infidels appeared to be having, although it might have reconciled Christians to the prospect of these jolly unbelievers roasting in hell. Probably they remembered the story of Lazarus in hell, and looked forward to the time when they would gather their wings round their scantily-clad bodies and looking down on the roasting heretics murmur, “You had your good time on earth.”

\* \* \*

#### Religious Truth

Then another change set in, or rather one of the old tales managed to gain a new burst of popularity. Instead of God hunting out the heretic to punish him, the heretic was presented as behaving like a little boy who “dares” another boy to touch him. The unbeliever was pictured as challenging God to prove his power by doing something terrible to him. Of course God never did meet the challenge fairly and squarely, but, as the Bishop of London explained, this was because he was patient and loving, or as other Christians explained, God was waiting till he got the blasphemmer in the next world, much as a virago of a wife says to her husband, “Wait till I get you home.”

This brings us to the joint lie of Mr. Fenby and Mr. Mackenzie. The history of this story, so far as it concerns Bradlaugh, has been told by his daughter, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner. She does not deal with its historical and anthropological aspects—which are really the only ones that repay attention, but confines herself to its connexion with her father.

A newspaper, *The British Monarchy*, in 1867, gave the first version thus: Bradlaugh was travelling in a Great Eastern railway carriage, and according to the narrator, was “as usual endeavouring to propagate his hateful opinions.” He pulled out his watch and said that if God did not strike him dead in a few minutes there would be “conclusive proof” of the truth of his opinions. “He was not struck dead because of God’s long-suffering mercy.” In 1868, a Mr. Charles Capper repeated the story in the course of a political speech, but of a different time and place. It next cropped up at Huddersfield, with a parson for its sponsor. In 1870 *The Christian* rolled up with the tale, but this time it took place in London. *The Financial Reformer*, in 1871, followed on with the story, this time at an open-air meeting. A little while after the Rev. Mr. Kitson retailed the legend as occurring at the Hall of Science. The Rev. Joseph Parker, of the City Temple, gave the story a new turn by ascribing it to Mrs. Besant. So it went on from time to time and from place to place. It was very monotonous, and bears out what I have said about the imaginative poverty of the Christian liar.

I do not know anything of Mr. Fenby, but Mr. Mackenzie is, I am told, a very staunch Roman Catholic, and ought to know that, calling on God to decide whether a man is right by punishing him on the spot if he is wrong, is a very, very old Roman Catholic custom. It was present in the trial by ordeal, which the Roman Church upheld as long as it could. It is present in the oath, which is administered in our courts, and which Mr. Mackenzie must have used if he was ever called as a witness in a court of law. It is present in a thousand and one ways from the common “gawd blimey” of the streets to the solemn assurance of all the churches that God

punishes us by wars, disease, or in other ways because we have, perhaps unconsciously, offended him. Mr. Mackenzie’s own Church is packed with legends of the occasions on which God has directly interfered in human affairs in response to the “egotism” of Christians, and thus “exacted” from God a “signal mark of individual attention.” Surely there would have been nothing more in Bradlaugh asking for what myriads of Christians have asked for and have been encouraged to ask for!

\* \* \*

#### An Offer of Help

After all, if Mr. Fenby was telling the truth, instead of handing out a very, very old religious lie, is there anything to get angry about? It seems to have been, as stated, a matter wholly between Bradlaugh and God. Bradlaugh did not ask God to prove his existence by striking the Archbishop of Canterbury dead. He took all the risks himself. But suppose Bradlaugh had issued the challenge, and after he had issued it had dropped down dead? What would the Christian have said then? Would he have blamed Bradlaugh? I doubt it. He would have treasured it as a most beautiful and desirable proof of God’s existence. I think that the Christian is really angry because, even if the incident occurred, that nothing happened, except that Bradlaugh went on civilizing Christians.

For my own part it is very ridiculous. If it were not so silly I should have no greater qualms in daring the whole tribe of Gods to show their presence than if I had dared Santa Claus to set my chimney on fire next Christmas Eve. I am not shocked at its blasphemy, but I am surprised at its stupidity, and do not see any adequate cause for indignation on the part of the “blasphemmer.” I really cannot grow indignant when the lie is told about Bradlaugh, for it is to me no more than an illustration of Christians lying for the “greater glory of God.” I feel also that it was treating God very contemptuously for the Christian to assume that he would take three whole minutes to do what anyone with a coal-hammer could have done in a couple of seconds. Bradlaugh would know that he was risking nothing, and I am quite convinced he realized that, even if he had killed that lie, another would have been manufactured to take its place.

So ends the latest version of a religious fable that dates back to the most primitive times. Across the centuries stupidity calls to stupidity and lie to lie. Only I do wish that Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Fenby in their religious zeal would manage to concoct a new lie. I desire this so strongly that I would even lend a hand. And I promise them that although I could not tell *more* lies than a Christian can when he is dealing with a Freethinker, I might be able to impart a little originality into them, and, as Poo-h-bah says, give an air of verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

None have fought better, and none have been more fortunate than Charles Darwin.

He found a great truth trodden underfoot, reviled by bigots and ridiculed by all the world.

He lived long enough to see it chiefly by his own efforts, irrefragably established in science, inseparably incorporated into the common thoughts of man.

What shall a man desire more than this?

T. H. Huxley.



## A Gospel for the Godless

"To bear all naked truths,  
And to envisage circumstances, all calm;  
That is the top of sovereignty."—Keats.

"The universe is transformation; life is opinion."  
Marcus Aurelius.

"THE gospel of those who do not believe in the supernatural." So wrote Ernest Renan, a critic of rare discrimination and fine distinction, of the "Meditations of Marcus Aurelius." Renan himself was an Oriental scholar of world-wide eminence, and his studies often led him to the examination of Eastern writers, "so different from myself," as he smilingly expressed it. But in the pages of Marcus Aurelius the great French writer found traces of a man after his own heart. This is no isolated opinion. The historian, Niebuhr, considered Aurelius "the noblest character of his time." Montesquieu was even more enthusiastic, for he says that the Emperor makes us think better of ourselves, because he inspires us with a better opinion of mankind. Our own Matthew Arnold regarded the "Meditations" as "counsels of perfection." Indeed, Aurelius has always exercised a powerful fascination over the minds of men, particularly men of outstanding ability.

Monarchs have been good, bad, and indifferent. Some have been monsters, some buffoons, others heroes, and even madmen. Very rarely, however, have they been philosophers. Frederick the Great delighted in the society of Freethinkers, and attracted the best brains of Europe to his court. Catherine of Russia befriended Denis Diderot, and other French "intellectuals." and Marguerite of Valois, to her eternal credit, held out her hands to the reformers of her day, at a time when heresy meant a cruel death. Only once, however, has a philosopher sat on the world's throne, and realized the dream of wise old Plato, who sighed for the ideal of a philosophic ruler. Marcus Aurelius, one of the most outstanding of the Roman Emperors, and one of the greatest of men, is known by his "Meditations," a little note-book, where he entered his reflections, often quite unconnected, on the questions that knock at every thoughtful man's heart. This tiny volume was considered for long a literary curiosity, as indeed it was. For Kings, as a class, were not remarkable for literary genius, and his book was a pearl of wisdom.

To be candid, Aurelius was unlike most monarchs, very unlike the proud, disdainful, Cæsars. Born in the midst of splendour and luxury, he scorned delights and lived laborious days. In his youth he assumed the Stoic dress, and even slept on a plain, wooden bed. Whilst still young and impressionable he became acquainted with the *Discourses* of Epictetus, and this coloured his whole life. This is not surprising, because Epictetus was an actual slave, and lame, yet "in the very dust of his thoughts was gold." So apt a disciple was Aurelius, that he has told us he found it possible to live in a palace without guards, or embroidered dresses, or torches, or statues, and other show; and to live very nearly as a private person without being remiss in action. Luxury and splendour he regarded as a mere hollow show. He put aside the pomposity of temples and altars, saying that for every true ruler the world itself was a temple, and all good men were priests. That was the manner of man he was, right through his life. When death came, in the camp on the battlefield, surrounded by his own soldiers, he said: "Why weep for me?" In very truth, and not in the language of eulogy, he was the noblest Roman of them all.

Curiously, his philosophy of quietism was thought out on battle-fields. For Aurelius was no feather-bed

soldier, nor did he review his troops within the safe purlieus of the parade-ground. What others learnt in calm, he learnt in tempest. On the wide Roman marshes might be heard the endless, steady sound of beating horses' hoofs and the marching feet of armed men. The barbarians were gathering their legions, and no man knew what the morrow would bring. Yet, burdened with the weight of empire and of Rome, he penned such words as these—not to be read at the distance of twenty centuries without an accession of pride and strength: "Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man." And again, "Do every action of life as if it were the last."

This life, he tells us, is all that concerns us:—

Though you were destined to live three thousand, or thirty thousand years, yet remember that no man can lose any other life than that which he lives now, and neither is he possessed of any other than that which he loses.

Obedience to nature is the key to life: "Everything harmonizes with me which is harmonious to thee, O Universe." "Pass through life conformably to nature and end the journey with content, just as an olive falls when it is ripe." Indeed, golden sentences confront us on every page, as for example:—

We are made for co-operation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the upper and lower teeth.

The best way of avenging thyself is not to imitate the wrong doer.

A man must stand erect, not be kept erect by others.

Be like the promontory against which the waves break in vain.

Epicurus bade his followers depart from life as a satisfied guest from a banquet. Marcus Aurelius, in sterner language, bids us leave life's stage as an actor who has played his part. Note the innate secularism embedded in his thoughts. It is this perfectly sane view of things which has caused his *Meditations* to become one of the most prized of volumes. It is this wise secularism which takes tired people back to Aurelius when all other religions and pseudo-philosophies have utterly failed them. What a book might be written of the great men who came to the *Meditations* in the bad hour, when fame and fortune, and honour itself, seemed as unreal as the gossamer fabric of dreams. For, by the irony of Fate, this austere ruler has become one of the great consolers of men, and his literary treasure one of the most precious heritages handed down the centuries.

Oh! the charm of Aurelius! He was so much more than a mere writer. There is nothing of the hysteria of the Old Testament prophets, nor of the morbidity of the Christian Fathers, but something of the directness of wise old Socrates. It is not his grace of language that causes men to read his little book to-day. It is not merely his archaic Stoic philosophy that causes men to turn to him from all other wisdom. It was not to Lucretius, with his world-grip of human destiny; or Virgil, with his tears of mortal fortune; or Horace, the singer of wine, women, and song; but to the austere soldier and ruler, that men turned in the last resort, "with close-lipped patience for their only friend." It is a splendid achievement, this power over men of other ages, other races, and alien sympathies, without any aid from a vested priesthood and paid professors.

Critics talk of the Ancient Greeks as being the teachers of Marcus Aurelius. It is true, but the golden book of the *Meditations* could only have been written by a Roman. The strength, the tenderness, the humanity, the resignation, these are the gifts of the lords of human things, the masters of the world. Critics again have pointed out that there is no coher-



ent system in the book of the *Meditations*. They do not claim to be other than self-commendings. The golden maxims should be read, as they were written, one at a time. Marcus Aurelius addressed them, not to the public, not even to a single reader, but to himself, as the sentinels and supports of his own conduct of life.

The present chaotic time is one in which such high-minded advice is priceless, for in all the world's literature, ancient and modern, there is no other book so full of perfect sanity and Secularism. It is because the *Meditations* are a bracing moral tonic in a time of ethical slackness and confusion that this little book still ranks among the unassailable assets of the day. The pomp and majesty of Ancient Rome has long faded, "like snow upon the desert's dusty face," but the great ruler's words of wisdom remain a most precious legacy, because he saw life at so many angles, and was himself honest, in word and deed. For twenty centuries he has been a real consoler of his fellow-men. He was a most worthy son of that illustrious ruler who, on his deathbed, gave to the captain of the guard the watchword of "Equanimity." He saw life steadily, and realized well what was actual and what was transitory, and his rare candour and probity have added imperishable lustre, not only to his own country, but to mankind.

"Hail to the steadfast soul  
Which, unflinching and keen,  
Wrought to erase from its depth  
Mist and illusion and fear!"

MIMNERMUS.

## Masterpieces of Freethought

SIX DISCOURSES ON THE MIRACLES OF OUR SAVIOUR

By THOMAS WOOLSTON

III.

No one who reads Woolston's first *Discourse* could doubt for a moment the author's complete sanity. It is as readable as anything written on the subject today. The argument is developed with great ability and scholarship; the passages from his authorities are given in the originals; and Woolston takes great care to quote famous Church Fathers, whose writings had always been produced as supporting the divine claims of Christianity. This was a very sore point with his opponents; and the only way they could answer him was by claiming that he either misunderstood or misquoted them. Woolston's opponents were so angry that they even urged that he had quoted "spurious" works of the Fathers, not seeing that this really made very little difference to his argument, which was that "the gospel is in no sort a literal story, and the history of Jesus's life is only an emblematical representation of his spiritual life in the souls of men." Had Woolston been living now, he would undoubtedly have sided with those of us who believe that the whole story of Jesus is purely mythical; and that the early gospel writers never meant their "life" of Jesus to be taken literally. In fact, he makes it quite clear that this is his object.

Woolston's first *Discourse* had a great success (the edition I am using is the fifth), and he promptly wrote a second, imploring his opponents to confute him. He pointed out that the miracles of healing—they were always being produced as proving the divinity of Jesus—were just as absurd as the other miracles. He remarks how little we get to know of the nature of the diseases we are told Jesus cured, and

how very few Protestants would believe in the healing power of a touch if the Pope or any Roman Catholic performed miracles in this way. The only explanation of this miraculous healing is that the accounts are allegories; Woolston takes some of them (for example, the case of the woman with an issue of blood), and shows how they can be compared to the sickness of the Church, with its spiritual physicians, the clergy and her "Quack ecclesiastical Doctors, who have all along contributed to her ill state of health," and just as the woman mentioned above "spent all her living, all her yearly income, upon her Physicians, and it seems to a bad Purpose; so very great and large Revenues of the Church are expended on her ecclesiastical Doctors in Spiritual Physick: And to what Purpose? Why to open and widen the bleeding Wounds of the Church, which they should heal and salve up."

This seems rather far-fetched as when the Gospels were written there was no Church—or a very poor one, without "great and large" revenues. Perhaps Woolston felt this a little, for he adds, "there is little or nothing of a Miracle to be made of the [woman's] cure, unless we were at a greater certainty of her Disease and the Manner, rationally speaking, of Jesus's healing of it."

Of another sick woman (in Luke) who had been ill for 18 years through Satan, Woolston deals at length as he feels he must supply the answer to the question, "How has Satan bowed and bound down the Church," which is, he claims, so often symbolized in the Gospels as a sick woman. And first he points out:—

The writings of the Evangelists so abound with Stories of Satan, Belzebub, the Devil, and of greater and less number of Devils, and of Demons, of unclean Spirits, more than any Histories before as one would think, if these Stories were literally to be understood, that was the Age in which Christ came, that Hell first broke loose, and then perpetually infested Mankind; and that upon the Destruction of Judea and the Propagation of the Gospel, the Devil accompanied the Jews in their Dispersion, or the Apostles in their travels, and have been the Tempters, Seducers, and Tormentors of other Nations ever since. Arnobius says, that before Christ, Devils were things unknown to the World; by which Arnobius must mean, either that they were hardly talked of before, or that their Nature was not understood, till Christ informed us of it. In both these senses, I believe, Arnobius may be taken, viz., that there was not only little Talk of Satan and the Devil, but less of his Nature apprehended, before Christ by his parables and parabolical Miracles, rightly interpreted and instructed us in it. And if after Ages have departed from the true and original Doctrine of Devils, making a literal Story of that which is only mystical and cabalistical; and have formed to themselves Ideas of hideous and horrible Fiends, Mormos and Hobgoblins, it shall not disturb me.

Allowing for the age in which he lived and the circumstances of his writing, it would be difficult to better this extract as a rational attack on the incredible and stupid nonsense in the holy gospels regarding Devils and their like. Woolston had, one can see, to restrain his own contempt for the people who believed in a real Devil living in a real Hell; and he did his best to show that even some of those Fathers who were ready to symbolize all sorts of things, but who were by no means disposed to give up an ever-living Satan, yet had to define Hell as a sort of evil state or "temper" in man himself.

The first two *Discourses* brought a number of replies, but Woolston felt he had not been answered. His opponents had to prove, he claimed, that the Fathers did not symbolize the miracles of Jesus; and



this they could not do. So he produced a third *Dis-course*, which angered the pious still more.

Speaking for myself, I have found few Christians ready to defend that particularly silly story of Jesus cursing a fig-tree, because he was hungry, and withering it with his curses. The only ones who did, lamely tried to defend it by claiming it was meant to be symbolical—which was just what Woolston said. He calls the "Miracle, such an absurd, foolish, and ridiculous, if not malicious and ill-natured Act in Jesus, that I question whether for Folly and Absurdity, it can be equalled in any Instance of the life of a reputed wise Man. The Fathers, such as Origen, St. Augustine, St. John of Jerusalem, have all said as smart things as the wittiest Infidels can, against the Letter of this Story." Though there is not the slightest doubt that Sir Leslie Stephen agreed with every word of this, yet he went out of his way to complain of Woolston's irreverence in treating of "sacred" things. Is the fig-cursing story more or less sacred than some of the other silly stories related of Jesus? The real crime which Woolston committed was not that he called things by their right names. It was that he wrote in the simplest possible language, every word of which could be understood by the common people. This was Thomas Paine's great crime for which, equally with Woolston, he was censured by the bland and reverent Agnostic, Sir Leslie Stephen, sitting quietly in his study able to write his own *History* in perfect safety through the courage and fortitude of fighting Freethinkers like Woolston and Paine. Stephen had to retract his ignorant attack on Paine and apologize for it. It is a pity he was not made to do full justice to Woolston.

H. CUTNER.

### The Book Shop

MR. EDMUND BLUNDEN has a reputation as a poet, and although his orthodoxy is a sheet anchor, some really fine thoughts escape from the circle circumscribed by faith. In his works there is a real ring of sweetness, together with the chime of commonsense; and casually looking again through his English Poems published in 1925, it was thought that readers of this journal would share my enthusiasm for the following two verses. The title in my opinion is ill-fitting, but the matter shows Mr. Edmund Blunden at his stoical best, and in this he has kinship with the late A. E. Housman:—

"THY DREAMS OMINOUS."

Blest is the man that sees and hears  
The shuttles of the eternal weaver,  
And shrieks not, sobs not savage tears,  
Burns not with fever.  
He is a tree that's finely planted  
Where a plunging cataract blanches,  
Spreading there as though enchanted  
His lucky branches.

But what if I, whose different thews  
Scarce bear the dawning light unwincing,  
Discovered in some curious clues  
Vision commencing?  
I should be driftwood, moon and sun  
In gulping, groaning water-gorges  
Sucked down, shot high, and snatched and spun  
Through timeless orgies.

Seneca, in his *Tranquility of Mind*, elaborates the above in prose, and in his answer to Serenus, advises his friend that "It is more man-like to scoff at life than to bewail it." The whole of Heine's works would indicate that one of the immortals had put this into practice. Mr. Edmund Blunden's works make a fair bid for permanence. They abound in clarity, they record most of what

is best and wholesome in human life, and in the things that matter he is fully aware of the true value of tradition. A little while ago this poet was a prominent figure on a committee of men of letters on free speech, the precise details of which escape me for the moment, but as a proof that he is a poet in the real sense, from my cuttings I give a significant extract as showing the temper of his mind. In a review of *England Under Victoria*, he writes: "It is more important to us to question what we may ourselves entail upon posterity, and what, if we do leave them some unholy climax, they may find in our memories to set off the obligation. Meanwhile, we are prepared to be friends with our Victorians, comic Bayards, silk-shirted Homers, my Lord Tomnoddy, the Girl of the Period, the Thin Red Line."

John Burroughs was vaguely known to me as an American naturalist, and mentally noted as a writer to be read. An arresting gem from the works of this author appeared in the *Freethinker* a few weeks ago, and chance, which plays all kinds of tricks, put three small volumes in my hands, together with another more weighty, this being his *Life of Whitman*. He quotes Whitman's *Laws for Creations*, and the extract which he gives is worthy of record for all men to read and understand at a period in the world's history, where it would like to be laid down that the only subject for discussion should be the weather. Here it is, as they say in children's picture books, and this paragraph concluded by the following has a very definite connexion with the paragraph above:—

What do you suppose creation is?

What do you suppose will satisfy the soul but to walk free and own no superior?

What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God?

And that there is no God any more divine than yourself?

And that is what the oldest and newest myths finally mean?

And that you or any one must approach creation through such laws?

Emerson died on April 27, 1882, and we count it a privilege and an honour to have met quite recently a noble soul who had known and spoken to that great intellectual giant. We were received kindly by a native of India, 81 years young, and at the banquet of friendly communication of ideas and opinions this gentleman spoke also of his contact with Robert Ingersoll during the Spanish American War. With bright eyes, a clear mind and active body, he is a rare combination, and he gave one the impression that he had always been at home in the world. The discussion turned to matters of faith and reason, but our new friend was on these subjects alarming in his simplicity. Asked to define his philosophical attitude to life after a long experience, he replied that his creed could be summed-up in the old Greek motto, "Man know thyself," and it would not be any exaggeration, as Browning admitted, that things begin to happen when a man struggles with himself, and ceases to be distracted by external influences which do not make for mental health. Your servant and keeper of "The Book Shop," with a good range of books to draw on, had done what many authors and writers have done before, namely, taken to reading the old classics again, and one essay of Montaigne, *Of Solitude*, prompted him to suggest Montaigne to his new friend. The honey-gatherer Montaigne revelled in Greek and Roman quotations, and one which appears in the above essay is taken from Quintilian, and is as follows: "For 'tis rare that men have respect and reverence enough for themselves." The reader will see that Montaigne was quite aware of the supreme importance of the self. And it is a knowledge of oneself that will help the student to thread the way of everyday existence. To recall a letter which the Editor of the *Freethinker* wrote to me during the Great War, the advice amounted to the same thing. It would perhaps be mistaken for patron-



age, but I must claim a contributor's privilege to recommend a reading of Montaigne's essay during times when one is not quite sure whether the world will go up in an explosion of force or become normal through an explosion of laughter. Low in the *Evening Standard* is on the side of laughter, and when hired hack journalists have done their negative and besotted worst, it is possible that such cartoonists as Low, Dyson and Peter Arno will enable us to see with the eyes of comedy what may be its opposite. "I am going now," I said, preparing to take my leave. "I shall not let you go," the Indian philosopher replied, and after a few seconds I picked up the meaning of the words, and although life is made up of meetings and partings, there is a gesture of dissent from change when the kindly souls one meets "will not let you go."

W. H. Hudson, whom one may read every time with profit and pleasure, if he were alive would be interested to know what some of his blackbird friends did following the disappearance of the old tin milk-can which was replaced by the bottle. The cardboard disc cover had been picked up on several occasions in the garden at a good distance from the house. Elementary reasoning said that there could be no effect without a cause, and it appears that the audacious blackbird, who is paid for his song with lost cherries, now pecks the cardboard disc from the milk bottle and drinks some of the contents. It may be also that the disc is carried away, as there is a certain proportion of cream adhering to it, and the specimen which I have preserved for this note has a third of it pecked away. There is no moral to this story except the theory of adaptability to change, and if there is the above phenomenon in bird-land, it is not asking too much to give mankind a run on the basis that he is a risen animal and chance the consequences; there is no need to emphasize mankind's career as a fallen angel.

*The New Yorker* is a weekly paper published in America and obtainable in England. It is witty and can talk trivially of serious things, and there is a good laugh on every page. For many months I have been intending to recommend it, as its existence is quietly ignored by humorous journals that probably fear a transfer of the subscription of their readers. The cartoons and drawings have a real bite in them, and there must occasionally be a smile of approval on the face of the statue of Liberty in New York. It is Rabelaisian with all the good qualities of Rabelais, and it is an excellent mental tonic. To those who hope that man will one day discard his boyhood's breeches and put on long trousers, *The New Yorker* by its boisterous use of ridicule extends a friendly hand. It dealt extensively with the case mentioned in the *Freethinker*, September 20, 1936, of Mrs. Eaton, which was taken up by the American Civil Liberties Union. Without being swamped in the bogs of psychology it does not require a superman to see that the world lacks the laugh which with its sound carries warmth to the human family. As a sample from bulk I give the following short extract:—

The universe, according to a student of nebulae, is expanding with surprising rapidity, and will unquestionably explode. The question is whether the universe will explode in due time by natural expansion, or will be blown up first by its untiring inhabitants, who are busy biting their thumbs at each other. World Peaceways sends out a weekly mimeographed letter to all its subscribers, describing the state of war

I leave readers to give it a trial, debiting all burst buttons, broken braces and damaged waist lines to

C-DE-B.

No people possesses such beautiful songs as the Germans. At present, the nations are too much occupied with political affairs, then let Germans, English, Spaniards, French, Italians, all go out into the green forests and chant our lays, and the nightingale shall be umpire. I am convinced that in the tournament of minstrelsy the songs of Goethe will win the prize.—Heine (1835).

## Black is White in Ireland

MISS CICELY HAMILTON has noted with surprise (in her recent travel book), that the Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland seem to have been rendered hysterical by the Spanish events.

Whatever the result of the struggle in Spain, an inevitable reaction in Ireland will be a renewed campaign to strengthen the many politico-religious organizations that have been set up to crush "Godless Bolshevism." The campaign, in fact, is already under way, and it is aimed not only at the very small Irish Communist Party, but at the orthodox Labour and Trade Union bodies, Republicanism, and all democratic and liberal thought.

The "shock-troops" of the campaign to safeguard Church and State are the members of the Catholic Young Men's Society, a body whose operations would appear startling in Britain, for they include such activities as intimidation, arson (dance halls, etc.), interference with State mails, boasted of publicly at an annual congress, up to the organization of violence and pogroms.

The spiritual propaganda which fortifies the C.Y.M.S. for such doughty deeds is best illustrated by the following report of a lecture given to the Tubbercurry Branch of the Society by the Rev. Father Connihan, S.J. The lecture is a classic of its kind. I quote the *Roscommon Herald* of August 29 last:—

The danger to-day was for some young people to profess loyalty, love and obedience to Christ, and at the same time to be disloyal and disobedient to Christ's Church. Every criticism of anybody or anything in the Catholic Church was really a criticism of Jesus Christ. The voice of the Church was the voice of Christ. "I believe," continued Father Connihan, "that the vocation of the C.Y.M.S. is the proclamation of that obvious but forgotten truth—'There can be no divorce of Christ and His Church.' " Hence there must be no criticism of the Catholic Church made or tolerated by the C.Y.M.S. It is for them always to think with the Church. The founder of his Order, St. Ignatius of Loyola, laid down rules of thinking with the Church. They are drastic rules. They demanded the laying aside of all private judgment and the readiness to believe what seems white to be black, if the Church so defines, remembering that between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Church, His Bride, there is one and the same spirit—the same spirit and Lord that gave the Ten commandments.

If young men did not come and fill their minds with the doctrines and ideals of the Catholic Church, then they might cease to be Catholics and simply become Christians, and eventually perhaps not even Christians but Communists.

And do not think that this is being said only in the backwoods of Connacht villages. It is publicly stated in Dublin, Cork and the big towns. Always in the past, Irish Catholics proclaimed their readiness to believe that black was white theologically, but not politically. "My religion from Rome, but not my politics." To-day, in unholy alliance with political interests, the clergy insist that Irish working-men and peasants believe that, on political and social issues only, white is black.

"GENERAL O'CONNOR."

## WOMAN AND THE BIBLE

Woman, man is in your advance respecting the Bible, for having preceded you in its attempted destruction, and often has he encountered your fierce indignation when he would have sacrificed the hydra-headed tyrant, your idol which has made you its too willing tyrant. Assist him in this work of annihilation, oppose him no longer. Realize that morals are not advanced or preserved through Bible teachings, progress secured or science unfolded. The next great battle of the world is to be fought on the heights of reason between the truths of science and the errors of superstition.—A non-



## More Dutch

ONE or two readers may recall that earlier in the year a member of the Dutch Parliament begged the Minister of Justice to prosecute Freethinkers in Holland. The following will give point to that request.

On September 21, last year, an article appeared in the *Vrijdenker* dealing with pilgrimages from Belgium to Lourdes by a Dutchman, resident in Belgium. At the instance of His Excellency Van Schaik, Minister of Justice, proceedings were instituted against the journal as a libel on Roman Catholics, and as containing expressions calculated to give offence to Roman Catholics.

Since the author of the article could not be reached, the editor, Heer J. Hoving, was prosecuted. The case was taken before one local court in January and then before another in April. In each case it was dismissed and Hoving was acquitted. The minister was obstinate and appealed to the High Court at Amsterdam. The final hearing was on July 16 last. It was more interesting than the other trials on account of a lively passage of arms between the Procuror-General and friend Hoving. The former said that in the article Roman Catholics had been referred to as "sheep" which they felt to be offensive. Replied Hoving, "The Church itself does as much, for it speaks of its "sheep," of the "fold" and the "shepherd"; how is it possible for Catholics to regard such an expression as offensive!"

The Procuror-General: "And what about 'sheeps-heads' then?"

Hoving: "Mr. Procuror-General, is it not evident that every sheep has also a head? Once we hear the metaphor of 'sheep,' we, only naturally, look upon it as having a head. To speak of a sheep lacking a head might very well have been insulting, but 'sheepshead,' never!"

There was also a skirmish about the title "Our Lady of Lourdes, 1st and 2nd class." At the earlier trials the prosecution asked for a penalty of three months' hard labour; at the appeal the penalty demanded was reduced to 50 florins fine. The Court was uninfluenced. Hoving was acquitted.

Before the trials the Catholic Press was full of the matter; but, after the first acquittal, not a word appeared about it.

Let us hope Hoving will survive a new attack as he has survived this and others before it. The new one comes from a society calling itself the *Vereeniging tegen Volksverwilderung* (Association against Misleading the People). It demands the suppression of broadcasts hitherto given by Hoving and other Freethinkers, the prohibition of the sale of the *Vrijdenker* in the station and kiosks of Amsterdam, and the prosecution of the *Vrijdenker* for insulting Catholics and Catholicism. This society has already distinguished itself by an attempt to break up the Dutch National Freethought Congress this year by what the Catholic press termed "sacred violence."

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

## Acid Drops

The Archbishop of Canterbury told an audience the other day, "We see things happening in civilized Europe to-day that recall the worst phases of the Dark Ages." No one will seriously dispute this, but the Archbishop's words require annotating if one is to get their full significance. For instance, the "Dark Ages" were the most Christian ages in the history of the world. And the people who are now behaving in such a way as to justify what the Archbishop said, are those who have been trained under Christian influence.

We really can't permit the Archbishop to get away with it, without pointing out these things. Until the other day the Church controlled education, it persecuted people for not professing Christianity, and it still controls things to a very considerable extent. Moreover,

the most powerful Christian Church in the world had control in Spain and Italy, to say nothing of Germany. In all these countries it has induced a state of things which makes it impossible for men of self-respect to live, while the relations between Christian nations is such that not one of them can trust the other to speak the truth or to act honestly. Does the Archbishop think the world could have been worse without Christianity? Particularly as the worst features of the present situation, the fanaticism, the intolerance, the desire to make a whole nation believe alike—to think alike is too strong an expression—with its inevitable brutality and savagery, are essentially the features of the Christian Church when it is not held in check by a secularized humanitarianism.

The Rev. J. Maillard's "ministry of healing" has had an extensive press, and if the claims made by this gentleman could be substantiated there would certainly be more need of similar "ministries," than of doctors. One pious believer gives the following as the result of his investigations—

In most cases, a definite improvement. In a few no change. In some—according to their own pronouncement—wonderful healing. Cripples who were helpless are walking—slowly; and to the blind sight is being restored. The hopeless have found hope; the sad, joy; the weak, strength.

Out of this, one can pick a definite "fact," that the blind are being made to see. Is this true? Has a single genuinely blind person had his sight restored? Is it possible that there are people who can really believe this?

Once sight has been *destroyed*, can any power on earth restore it? Is there any living oculist who would admit that the laying on of hands, or the sincere wailing of a prayer could possibly make a blind man see? We think that raising hope in this way is contemptible, just as is the whole fraud of Lourdes. The ordinary medical man gives, as part of his practice, "hope" and "strength" and "joy" without any "ministry" of healing; and he *cures* in countless cases. These are facts and far more significant than any nonsense about the "power of prayer," or the laying on of hands.

The Rev. C. B. Mortlock says "the Christian warrior can never be a defeatist for he knows that victory is assured." If this has any meaning it certainly implies that Christianity is winning the great fight against Freethought or "infidelity." Now, is it? Do more and more people believe in miracles, in Hell-fire, in Devils, in the Virgin Birth, in the Resurrection, in the Pope as God's Vice-Regent on earth—or fewer and fewer? One has only to ask the question to see the utter absurdity of the Rev. Mortlock's precious pronouncement.

The problem of the "untouchables" in India is one of the most pressing in that country; and the failure of their own religion to do anything for them has made the unfortunate people turn to Christianity. It is by no means certain that Christian missionaries are shouting for joy at this turning to Christ for help, however much he may have helped other people in ages past. It seems that the "untouchable converts tend to come over in masses rather than individually." And therefore "if the Church admits in a wholesale manner half-converted, illiterate people, it may be sowing seeds of trouble." but why? After all, are not illiterate people as acceptable to Christ as educated ones? Does God, who makes no distinction of persons, prefer the one and not the other? What a commentary on Christianity and its missionaries.

On the subjection of the black man in South Africa, we are glad to record the Bishop of Southampton's outspoken words: "I believe," he said the other day, "that it never pays to keep people down. You cannot go on sitting on a safety valve indefinitely. The natives are full of despair, and with good reason." But it is the



good, kind, Christian Government of South Africa which is keeping the native down, and denying him elementary rights of human liberty and justice. What is the Church, here and there, doing about it? Anything whatever? It may be (and is) a good thing for a Bishop to be outspoken for once. It would be better if the Church, as a Church, denounced in no uncertain terms the way in which white Christians are acting towards their "black" fellow-men, many of whom are also Christians. But where black and white men are concerned, God is a great respecter of persons.

Mr. Hilaire Belloc is very fond of writing fatuous nonsense for the benefit of his credulous readers. He wrote recently that, "the orthodox Catholic will say: 'The Church accepts the authenticity of St. John's writings, and I accept the authority of the Church.' But the most thorough-going Atheist can say: 'I do not believe a word of the doctrine enunciated in the Gospel, but evidently it was written by a man who knew Jesus Christ.'" Well, the most thorough-going Atheist can say anything, but it is *most* unlikely he would say anything of the sort. No one who understands Gospel criticism would admit for a moment that any of the Gospel writers knew "Jesus Christ." The Gospels, as we have them, are at least as late as 150 A.D., and John's is quite different from the other three. And they are all anonymous, unauthentic, and absolutely incredible. But it wouldn't do to tell Catholic readers the truth.

A Catholic newspaper seems very puzzled at a recent newspaper controversy about black Madonnas, and thinks that "a natural explanation for the black colour seems sufficiently satisfactory without dragging in any alleged Egyptian or Indian origins." It does not give the "natural explanation"—except by saying that "the natural wood in which the statues were made turned black with age." This may be so in some, but what about the black *stone* statues? The "natural" explanation is, of course, that the black Madonnas are simply statues of either Isis, or of Maia, the mother of Christhua. This is a simple explanation, and has the additional advantage of being true.

Father A. Roche has publicly declared that "to convert England will be a hard and difficult task." He gave reasons for his belief in this—mostly the usual kind of tosh one expects from these people; and he concluded by saying, "There must be a real and a rallying point, and that rallying point we have in the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom." We respectfully suggest that the Guild, whether as a rallying point or not, has as much chance of converting England as would "Our Lady of Ransom" herself. The way Catholics can be hypnotized by words and stupid words at that is more than astonishing and confirms in every way Carlyle's famous dictum.

*The Tablet* protests against "Anti-Religious Broadcasts," in an impudent leading article, which exhibits an appalling lack of fairness. Some of us would go a long way in the direction of avoiding religious and irreligious controversy over the Radio. But only religious teachers could calmly suggest that it is perfectly fair to broadcast one side of a subject and to boycott every word of reply; to slander an enemy and refuse him opportunity for any answer. But this is religion all the time, in all ages.

A story about G. K. Chesterton is vouched for as true by the *Methodist Recorder*:—

A friend met him once and said, "Give me a little drawing." "Certainly," said G.K.C., and immediately did a little sketch of a monk kissing a nun. He wrote underneath, "Natural law in the spiritual world."

It sounds like the Christmas Party where guests were asked to come dressed to illustrate any book-title chosen. One man came armed to the teeth, with guns and bombs completely obliterating the man himself. When asked what book he represented, he replied: "The Evidences of Christianity."

Dr. Herbert Gray, in his latest work *The One Way of Hope*, has given offence to the Fundamentalists by his frank repudiation of many of the sacred absurdities of orthodoxy. He says: "the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Our Lord in the flesh do not matter one whit, one way or the other," and he "has no use for the Pauline doctrine of the Atonement." The orthodox need not worry. Dr. Gray is merely throwing overboard a few odd remnants in order the better to retain the worst of all the dogmas of the Church. Christ remains "the One Way," there is no hope for the world if we do not accept this hoary myth. Dr. Gray is just as tolerant as any other believer. The outlook would be dark indeed if mankind could only find its salvation in so dark a superstition as that which Dr. Gray preaches.

One has only to peruse the average country newspaper to realize what a long, long way from even current knowledge the rustic treads. He is still a fundamentalist, and Bishop Barnes or Dr. Inge would be as much anathema to him as the very devil. The younger generation in our villages and country towns is under a greater handicap than the dwellers in cities because the older generation still assumes the "privilege" of age to enforce church observance.

In connexion with Driffield (Yorks) Harvest Thanksgiving, a Mr. D. Prince presided over a local Methodist Sunday School service. Mr. Prince said, he "owed much to the training he got in the Sunday School"; he was brought up "as far as Sunday School was concerned, in the Primitive Methodist Sunday School"; he wished to pay a tribute to "teachers in his Sunday School years ago"; he was "partly trained in the Sunday School"; he had in mind the words a teacher said to him "when he left that particular Sunday School"; he "paid a tribute to that kind lady's words in the days of his Sunday School"; he "would encourage the young men and women who were connected with that church and Sunday School"; and he "had overcome criticism when doing Sunday School work." The gentleman had evidently something to say about his Sunday School.

Adam and Eve stole an apple from the Garden of Eden and were promptly pitched out of paradise. Three lads recently stole 7 lbs. of apples from a shed at Oldchurch, Essex, ate them, and then went straight to church. The Lord did not intervene, they were not his apples in this case. The lads were sent to a remand home, but a labourer aged 23, who should have known better, helped the lads in the stealing. He was placed in the care of the Salvation Army—serves him right.

### The "Freethinker" Circulation Drive

It is proposed to celebrate the coming-of-age of the present editorship by an attempt to create a substantial increase in the circulation of this paper. The plan suggested is:—

(1) Each interested reader is to take an extra copy for a period of twelve months, and to use this copy as a means of interesting a non-subscriber to the point of taking the *Freethinker* regularly.

(2) So soon as this new subscriber is secured, the extra copy may be dropped by the present subscriber. Until this is accomplished, he will regard the extra threepence weekly (for one year) as a fine for his want of success.

The plan is simple, and it is not costly; but it does mean a little work, and whether or not it is more blessed to give than to receive, it is certainly easier for most to give than it is to work. But in this case it is the work alone that will yield permanent benefit. There are many thousands of potential readers in the country; why not try and secure some of them?



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTÉ

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C.F.—One ought always be in sympathy with men like Tyndale on account of their courage, but we doubt if he would have been praised for this had he not been himself a Christian. The praise of Christians is most often a disguised compliment to themselves.

C.L.—Mr. Cohen will be lecturing in London at the Winter Garden Ball Rooms, Clapham, on Sunday, November 1. He is cutting down his lecturing this winter as much as possible, owing to medical and domestic orders.

We regret that two errors occurred in "Things Worth Knowing," last week, taken from *Sacrifice to Attis*, by Dr. W. A. Brend. In the first paragraph "A good deal of instruction of practical value is really given for the purpose of developing character" should read "A good deal of instruction of no obvious practical value," etc. In the penultimate paragraph "the caricaturist seized upon the elderly figure" should have read "elderly military figure."

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—

One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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

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

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

## Sugar Plums

To-day (October 18), Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Picton Hall, Liverpool, at 7.0, on "Some Aspects of Life and Death." Admission will be free, but there will be a limited number of reserved seats. We hear that "crowded house" is expected, although that will be nothing unusual.

Mr. Cohen is preparing a series of twenty sixteen-page pamphlets, dealing with popular Freethought subjects, in a popular way. The titles of the first two are *Did Jesus Christ Exist?* and *Morality Without God*. These two pamphlets will be ready by November 1, and it is hoped to issue two each month afterwards. The pamphlets will be well printed and should be useful as means of propaganda.

The following is from *The New Statesman and Nation*:—

The action of the Pope in blessing the Spanish rebels raises some interesting points. The opponents of Catholic Emancipation in this country always argued that the Pope claimed the right to release subjects from their civil allegiance. They seem to have been right. Secondly, what do good Catholics make of a Papal blessing for Mohammedan Moors when they slaughter Basque Catholics? Thirdly, included in this blessing are the soldiers who killed militiamen—as the Times correspondent described—on the altar steps of Badajoz Cathedral. Surely we must go back a long way—to the days of the Schism and the less reputable Popes, I think—to find a Vicar of Christ condoning, and even

approving, a holy and bloodthirsty war carried out by infidels. I fully sympathize with the horror of Roman Catholics at the burning of churches and images, but those who know anything of the history of Spain might surely have expected from the Pope a call to repentance, because the Church, which has dominated that country for so many centuries, has kept its children in such brutal ignorance and superstition that when a chance of freedom comes to them their instinct is to burn and kill in revenge. The other day a platform speaker in this country was asked about people burning the churches. Well, he said, the Church has burnt enough of them! They are only getting a bit of their own back! A savage reply; but it is a pity when English Catholics forget the historical background of Spanish savagery.

Saturday evening, November 28, should be reserved by all London Freethinkers for a Social arranged by the Executive of the N.S.S., at Caxton Hall, Westminster. There will be dancing, vocal and instrumental items, also, it is hoped, a few words from the President. Another interesting feature is the opportunity for meeting and conversing with Freethinkers from different parts. Tickets 2s. 6d. each (which include light refreshments) will shortly be available.

The new Leeds Branch of the N.S.S. appears to be making good progress, but the Secretary writes of their need of local speakers. We hope these will soon make their appearance, but it is well to exercise care in their selection. The local Secretary's address is Mr. M. Feldman, 58 Meanwood Road, Leeds.

We have read many books about Russia, written since the Revolution, but we had also read a great many about Russia long before the Revolution took place. This gives us a little advantage over those who appear to have only heard about Russia since the European War, and who in judging that country, and the gigantic experiment that is being tried out, test it by standards that are not really applicable. But of all the books we have read of recent years, we have read none with greater interest than Ethel Mannin's *South to Samarkand* (Jarrold, 12s. 6d.). Miss Mannin did not go out with a tourist party, or rather she did not travel in Russia with one. She and her friend travelled with the people, and often lived with them. She was bound for Samarkand, and they reached their goal, mainly "on their own," without much official assistance, sometimes despite official resistance, and with passports that were not always in order. She found a great deal to admire, and much to condemn; the dirt of masses of people and of their homes, for instance, to which she recurs again and again. But she recognizes that the dirty rooms, and nasty habits she saw were part and parcel of Russian life long before it went "Bolshie," and that life is certainly better than it was. She noted the hardships to which the people are subjected, but also the assertion of those who declared that "things are getting better every day." And it would be well for those who recoil from the picture of insanitary and crowded houses to bear in mind that, with every advantage in our favour, we have not yet abolished filthy slums, and that fifty years ago the English slum would have held its own for all that was objectionable. There is also an amusing account of her visit to a Caucasian health resort, once exclusively used by aristocratic and wealthy classes, but now a health resort for the "workers," and of her surprise at finding men and women bathing quite naked. But that was a custom there long before the Revolution. It is also pointed out that there was nothing in the behaviour of the people that called for reproof.

The things that come out quite clearly in Miss Mannin's "travel book," are the immense extent of Russia, the wide varieties of life and peoples and conditions and customs which make any generalization extremely dangerous, the general kindness of the Russian people—often very childishly expressed—their readiness to obey orders, and at the same time to dodge them, the general feeling that in spite of hardships, they are moving towards something better, and the perfect mania for subordinating everything to the so-called practical aspect of life. She does not like the subordination of the indi-



vidual to the State, nor does she enthuse over what is being done in the way of providing clinics, crèches, playing fields and welfare organizations. The Russians are naturally proud of what is being done in this direction (a medical friend of ours who has travelled in Russia tells that the Russians have the finest medical service in the world), and Miss Beatrice King has told us of the immense work that is being done for education. Miss Mannin says:—

It is not these things in themselves which are so remarkable, but that *Russia* has been able to achieve them. Many of the things which tourists rave about in the U.S.S.R. are actually less good than those done in Capitalist countries, a fact which the rabidly pro-Soviet is apt to overlook. The important consideration is that after centuries of tyranny under the Czars the workers have at last been able to achieve these benefits. . . In the U.S.S.R. all such achievements can only be judged on what has gone before.

That is the right note. *Russia* must be judged from what it was; and what it was, made it impossible for it to be worsened by anything that could be tried. Much as remains to be done, distasteful as many of the conditions that prevail in *Russia* would be to us, the Russian may well hold up his head and walk with a surer step when he realizes what has been done. *Russia* is not yet a heaven, but it is at least less of a hell for the many millions who were once ground down by an autocracy and a church. Those who will read *South to Samarkand* rightly will find it helpful to understand the nature of the Russian experiment, and will the better appreciate its possible influence on the rest of the world. Rows of statistics are necessary, and to many, interesting. But when we realize that the material with which these deal is made up of human beings, then a book like that under notice is a delight to read.

## The Supreme Singer of Ancient Rome

THE eminence of Lucretius as a pioneer and poet is universally recognized by the literary world. Mrs. Browning, herself a poetess of no mean standing, long since declared that the rationalistic Roman poet denied divinely the divine and died, chief poet by the Tiber's side. And not as a bard alone, but also as a thinker, Lucretius occupies an exalted position in philosophical and scientific circles. In his critically appreciative volume, *Lucretius, Poet and Philosopher* (Cambridge University Press, 1936), Mr. E. E. Sikes, President of St. John's College, Cambridge, acclaim Lucretius as the father of modern anthropological science. In this work its author has furnished the studious public with a scholarly survey of the Latin genius' services as a religious reformer, his meditations on life and death, his relationship with contemporary moral teaching and the modern science of man.

It has been urged that true poetry simply expresses the emotional, æsthetic and imaginative feelings of the poet and has no relation to teaching. Yet, the very greatest poets, such as Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe prove greatly instructive. Lucretius expounded the philosophy of his honoured and approved good master, Epicurus, and was necessarily didactic. Indeed, what Crichton Browne once termed Lucretius' "dark and doubtful sayings," have been the occasion of many animated discussions, both in Britain and abroad. After all, each splendid singer must be judged by his peculiar merits. Wordsworth and Lucretius alike were poets of Nature, and as Sikes says: "It is not wonderful that the Roman and the English teacher, who both learned their lessons from Nature, should have taught with the same spirit, even if the lessons themselves were so different as to supply a contrast rather than a comparison."

Lucretius earnestly expounded the atomic views of Democritus, and his feelings were deeply stirred by the majesty of the sun, moon and stars suspended in the azure skies of Italy. Towards the lower animals and his fellow-men, his attitude was markedly humanitarian, and in this he stands supreme among Roman poets. In his reference to the sacrifice of Iphigenia to the bloodthirsty gods, he displays a glowing indignation concerning the atrocities inflicted by religion on humanity. At the fatal hour:—

"By rough men she was handled, and shuddering  
Brought to the altar, not with escort due  
And bridal-song, after the marriage rite,  
But haled, a virgin chaste, ripe to be wed,  
Victim of her own father, that the fleet  
Might win a fair and fortunate voyaging.  
—Such crimes could Superstition teach mankind."

Half a century ago, Cardinal Manning asserted that no instance of family life and affection, so familiar in Christian lands, could be discovered in Pagan literature despite passages in Horace, Lucretius and other classical writers to the contrary. Mr. Sikes recalls Lucretius' beautiful description "of the wife welcoming her husband home, while his children hurry to snatch the first kiss and touch his heart with silent joy. It is clear, too, from another passage, that Lucretius attaches great importance to the natural affection of family life in the history of the human race."

While adverse to Puritanism, with its inevitable reactions, the poet was sternly opposed to every form of profligacy, and his analysis of the procreative passion is unrivalled in the wide domain of Latin poetry. As our author notes: "No aspect of sexual passion is omitted or glazed; yet the whole leaves no bad taste in the reader's mouth. There is nothing of Ovid's lubricity or Juvenal's grossness. Here, as elsewhere, the poet is intensely serious." Perhaps his picture is too sombre, but Lucretius had no patience with those who wasted their substance in amorous adventures to the detriment of the serious duties of life.

Lucretius is one of the most impersonal of poets, and little is known concerning him, and the few fragmentary references to him are discordant. He died about 55 B.C., and that he was well-acquainted with the Eternal City his writings clearly prove. Also, there is the Christian Jerome's assertion that the Pagan poet was made insane by a love potion which drove him to suicide. But this tale lacks confirmation, and it is suggested that Jerome, who naturally detested Lucretius' teachings, took the story from Suetonius, whose scandal-loving statements are not always above suspicion. Moreover, all the eminent contemporaries of the poet are silent on the subject. Sikes points out that Jerome's statement "is not supported by either Arnobius or Lactantius, who have frequent occasion to mention the work of Lucretius, and who might be expected to draw a pious conclusion from the fate of an 'Atheist.'"

As a disciple of Democritus, Lucretius was naturally a materialist, and he elaborated the atomic views of his mentor. The physical universe he held to be composed of atoms and even the eternal gods who dwelt in solitude apart were made up of atoms of an ætherial character. But as these distant deities never interposed in human affairs they were of little consequence. Moreover, it seems doubtful whether the Epicureans seriously believed that they existed at all.

Lucretius regarded death as the natural ending of consciousness. In fact, in Hellas as in Rome, at a later time, the belief in the immortality of man was largely discredited by the educated classes. Yet, if one may judge from the fierce onslaught of Lucretius the dread of death remained unabated in the minds of



the Roman populace. Truly, it has been urged that the poet seriously overrated the common fear of post-mortem punishment. Still, in rural Italy this repulsive superstition was then, and long afterwards an integral constituent of religion. Sikes states that: "Etruscan religion in particular, was much occupied with the tortures of the underworld, and Tuscan tombs were grimly decorated with paintings of Charon engaged in punishing the souls of sinners. . . . That this idea had penetrated to other parts of Italy is clear from the evidence of Plautus." But all fear of future torment disappears when with Lucretius we realize that:

"death is nothing, and no whit  
Concerns us, since the nature of the mind  
Is proven mortal."

If from the modern standpoint the theories of Lucretius and his Sicilian predecessor Empedocles appear somewhat crude, both viewed the world of life as a product of evolution. And when Lucretius deals with human progress his outlook becomes distinctly scientific. He speaks of the centuries when man:—

"Still lived nomad; no strong husbandman  
Guided the plough, or worked the land with iron,  
Or planted saplings, or was skilled to lay  
Sickle to the tall tree's decaying branch.  
Sun, rain and earth offered spontaneous gifts  
Sufficient for their wants; the oak-forest  
Gave customary food. . . .  
Other coarse food there was, that well sufficed  
Poor man, in the flowery spring-time of the earth.  
Knowledge as yet was wanting, how to employ  
Fire, and to clothe the body with skins despoiled  
From beasts: in glade and wood and mountain cave  
Man lurked among the bushes squalidly,  
To escape the violent lash of wind and rain."

Acorns and berries were then man's Spartan fare, and love was restricted to sexual attraction. The earliest advances towards civilization were the construction of rude shelters, the use of animal skins as raiment, the use of fire and a mode of marriage leading to family-life. Thus higher cultures were ultimately evolved.

The Epicureans regarded language as a natural growth, and Lucretius clearly enunciated a doctrine now universally accepted by philologists. Imitation of various natural sounds supplemented by gestures, later reinforced by signs or names deliberately adopted, proved the substratum of all succeeding languages. Mr. Sikes pertinently says that Lucretius is "mainly concerned with the 'natural' stage, and his analogy from the sounds made by animals in their various moods is very striking, and was supported by Darwin: 'I cannot doubt that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification of various physical sounds, the voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries.'"

A notable example of poetic prevision appears in Lucretius' description of agricultural evolution. Observation of Nature suggested planting and grafting when man saw that the nuts and berries that fell from the trees and bushes produced an undergrowth of saplings. Hence came the effort to transplant these growths, and this proving successful, man beheld the fruits and berries

"Grow tame by tender care; and day by day  
The entanglement of woods was driven higher  
Up mountain sides, yielding a place below  
To tilth; so might be found on plain and hill  
Room for mead, corn, pool, channel and fruitful vine,  
So might the grey-green belt of olives run  
To mark the bounds of valley and hill and plain,  
Even as, to-day, thou seest in varied charm  
The countryside adorned with interspace  
Of fruits, all sweetly fenced with orchard trees."

As a Freethought evangelist Lucretius ranks among the supremely great. He was deeply impressed with

every aspect of evolving Nature as his masterpiece plainly proves. Yet, his dominant passion was truly to present man's relationship to his terrestrial surroundings. And, above all, he was most solicitous to dispel human dread of angry or capricious deities during life, and their infliction of evil after death. Death is an endless sleep, and Nature has decreed that every plant and animal organism that lives must surely die.

T. F. PALMER.

## Things Worth Knowing\*

LVIII.

### THE GREED OF THE CHURCH

It is difficult for the modern Englishman to realize, even remotely, the power of the medieval clergyman in his parish. . . . In 1287, Bishop Quivil, of Exeter, published a series of diocesan constitutions, which not only summarize the most important points of English Church Law, but also add very valuable illustrative comments. These illustrative instructions, dealing simply with the pressing needs of the moment, and in no way concerned with a distant posterity, throw, perhaps, more light upon medieval parish life than any other document of equal length. Just as the good bishop has no doubt that Jews are born to be servants of Christians, so also he does not hesitate to remind the laity very plainly of their filial subordination to the clergy, a subordination which aggravates the sin of every trespass upon clerical possessions and privileges.

. . . It was punishable to stay away from Mass on Sundays or holy days; to frequent another parish church in preference to one's own; to omit the yearly Easter confession and communion; or to break the ecclesiastical fasts. The Archdeacon levied pecuniary fines on the immorality of the lay folk as well as that of the clergy—a system which lent itself to frequent bribery and extortion, as we know, not only from Chaucer and his fellow satirists, but also from the repeated complaints of Church councils. The tithes, again, constituted a land tax, income tax and death duty† far more onerous than any known to modern times, and proportionately unpopular. Not only were the farmers and cottagers bound to render a strict tenth of their produce—theoretically, at least, down to the very pot-herbs of their gardens—but merchants, shopkeepers and even the poorest artisans were bound to pay from their personal earnings this same tax of two shillings in the pound. Moreover, the law was pitiless to the peasant. Tithes of wool were held to include even the down of his geese; the very grass which he cut by the roadside was to pay its due toll; the farmer who deducted working expenses before tithing his crops damned himself thereby to hell. As Archbishop Stratford complained to

\* 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.

† Following St. Thomas Aquinas the Canonists held . . . prostitutes are bound to pay tithes of their sinful earnings, though the Church ought to refuse contributions so long as they are unrepentant "lest she seem to share in their sin." When, however, the woman has repented, or if her sin be secret to the world though known to the Church authorities, then the tithe may be taken. The very lepers were bound to pay tithes, with some exceptions; and the beggar was theoretically bound to contribute a tenth of his receipts from alms, though here, of course, the priest was in conscience bound not to accept it.



the Synod of London (1342) "Men straying in damnable error stumble into the destruction of their own souls, paying (first) the tenth sheaves of their crops for the harvesters' wage, and thus by a false calculation rendering only the eleventh sheave as tithe, contending that they may fairly pay their labourer's harvest wages from the crops before tithing, and thus setting at naught the precepts of both the Old Testament and the New."

. . . Nor were the tithes the only burdens of the kind that fell upon the laity. Apart from the compulsory rates for the maintenance of the fabric and general Church expenses. . . it was conveniently assumed that even the most scrupulous parishioners must have at some time failed to pay their full due of tithes; and, as any such retention constituted a mortal sin, the clergy claimed a "mortuary" of every dead parishioner in the direct interest of his soul. . . . The tax might therefore amount to a succession duty of 33 per cent on personal property, and in some districts it was frankly calculated on that basis. . . .

Imagine for one moment the feelings of a struggling household—one of those large families, working hard day by day to keep the wolf from the door—who formed so healthy a proportion of ancient as well of modern England. The breadwinner has just been taken, and the outlook would be dark enough in any case; but here comes the lord of the manor to claim for his mortuary (as he often might) the dead man's best beast. Next comes the priest—he who claims to live among his people as a direct spiritual descendant of Christ's Apostles—to take away the second best, in which he has claimed a vested interest from the first moment when the wretched peasant took to his dying bed; and the family now struggle on as it best can with the worst of three cows that once formed its stock. In some places the very bed itself became the perquisite of him who had knelt in prayer, beside it, and spoken to the dying sinner of a Shepherd who gave his life for His sheep. . . . We need not wonder that bishops based their constitutions and popes their bulls on the notorious fact that "the laity are bitterly hostile to the clergy."

. . . Besides tithes and mortuaries, there were also "oblations" or offerings at Mass on certain feast days. It was admitted that these (like mortuaries) had at first been purely voluntary; but already in the thirteenth century the clergy insisted on them as a right, resting on the canonical principle that long custom, if laudable in itself, acquires the binding force of law—and what custom could be more laudable than that a layman should offer to God for remission of his sins?

. . . A plentiful source of income to the clergy, and of scandal to the thinking clergy was the abuse of Indulgences. All our cathedrals, and many of our great churches, owe much of their magnificence to these Indulgences, which were frequently collected by absolutely unscrupulous rascals, as we know not only from such satirical pictures as Chaucer's *Pardoner*, but from equally plain complaints on the part of Popes and Church Councils during the three centuries preceding the Reformation. . . . The Council of Mainz, in 1261, complained that they destroyed real Church property, and that much of what they wheedled out of the faithful was spent in drunkenness, gambling and lechery.

. . . I must add one last word about what was perhaps the most profitable of all—the supervision and probate of wills. Apart from the very small minority who were rich enough to make written wills, every man was obliged to dispose of his property by word of mouth, in the presence of the parish priest. Let us put ourselves for a moment in the dying man's

place. Whatever else the poor wretch may believe or disbelieve, of hell and purgatory he has never been allowed to doubt. Whenever he entered his parish church, there stood the great ghastly picture of the Last Judgment staring down at him from the walls—blood and fire and devils in such pitiless realism that, when they come to light nowadays, even sympathetic restorers are often fain to cover them again with decent whitewash. A picture of this kind, seen once or twice a week for fifty years, is indelibly branded into the soul of the dying man; and however he may have allowed these things to influence the conduct of his life, however deliberately he may have overreached and cheated and robbed in his generation to scrape his little hoard together, here on his death-bed he has at least the faith of a devil—he believes and trembles. He knows that gifts to the Church are universally held to be one of the surest preservatives against the pains of purgatory, he has perhaps seen men burned at the stake for denying a truth so essential to the Roman Catholic creed. What wonder, then, if death-bed legacies to the clergy and to the churches became so customary that the absence of such pious gifts was taken for proof presumptive of heresy, and that in some districts the dying man was compelled as a matter of course to leave a third of his goods to the Church.

*Ten Medieval Studies* (Third Edition)  
by G. G. COULTON, pp. 123-136.

### The (Spiritual) Ministry of Munitions

"The Son of God goes forth to war," of course. What then could be more appropriate than the Rev. Albert Mackinnon (D.D.)'s suggestive head-line in the *British Weekly*: "Speed Up Spiritual Munitions"?

Dr. Mackinnon's predilection for the Bible as a source of warlike strength can only be an argument in favour of prohibiting the export of such powerful weapons to any country where our own armies may have to stand up against them. This militant spiritual Colonel Blimp has all the Armament Firms' descriptions off by heart:—

Those who are familiar with the explosive power of the Bible know that it possesses the dynamite which alone can break the hardness of the human heart.

We cannot imagine a more inappropriate allusion, however, than to refer to any such modern invention as dynamite. The many objections to Bible "weapons" are all disputed by Bible advocates, but that these "munitions" are of very ancient date is not only admitted, it is one of the proudest boasts of the Ministry of Religious Arms—whose "general" is called the "Ancient of Days."

A meeting of the British Cabinet would doubtless listen with impatience to Lord Cantaur or Lord Lybor offering to supply spiritual swords and spears to oppose foreign tanks, aeroplanes and battleships, but the most reckless of Chancellors would be appalled to learn the outrageous cost involved, in supplying the most out-of-date weapons imaginable.

We cannot think Dr. Mackinnon's roseate calculations would impress any informed Cabinet when he says:—

If one battleship had been transformed into Bibles a whole fleet could have been scrapped, for there would have been no one to use it against. This is not exaggeration.

Certainly the Divine Doctor speaks of "transforming" one single battleship ("camouflaging" it perhaps), and he may, of course, picture the remainder of the Fleet playing hell with the enemy (completely bewildered by seeing Bibles actually used for the first time in history).

Dr. Mackinnon tells a long and (so far as we see) completely pointless yarn about the Crimea War, in which, he says, the Spiritual omnipotence of the Bible was really used on Italian soldiers in Turkey. Bibles were



shipped to these poor soldiers, and the Moslem Turks (always sardonic foes of Christianity) "put no restriction on these Bibles being distributed to Italian soldiers." Whether these Bibles caused Italy to defeat its enemies, or whether it kept Italians so busily reading in Constantinople that English regiments captured Sebastopol, or what the Bible did—anyhow, we cannot guess.

But our teacher goes on to say the great question of the day is "How many Bibles have you personally sent into Italy?" We find "confusion worse confounded." Why make Mussolini more powerful than he is? If he boasts to-day that he can put seven or eight million soldiers in the field, including the Infants' Class, why add to his potentialities? Italy, says Dr. Mackinnon, "is practically a Bibleless country."

"Speed Up Spiritual Munitions, that is the need of the hour," sounds uncommonly like fishmongers advertising "Fat More Fish." Of course, if you fire enough of the most effective projectiles with the right kind of guns, you can kill plenty of people who stand in the way. But Bibles? There is no parallel between war and "spiritual munitions." You may take a horse to a well, but you cannot make people read Bibles. All mankind knows that Bibles produce wars, that religions produce conditions of hate, that what the world most needs is to dispense with ignorance and to cease "doping" the world with superstition.

Dr. Mackinnon, even in a "peace" article, cannot hide his hate of Catholicism—the Christianity of Mussolini's country. And he cannot help lying about Free-thinkers who love peace, but do not believe in the Bible which is full of war and praises of war. For us Dr. Mackinnon has only the slander that "Force is the creed of the Christless home."

We search the pages of history in vain to trace a single effort of peace which has depended solely upon Bible inspiration. We read whole volumes of wars caused entirely by religious differences. We know that Bibles have supplied innumerable texts which have been quoted again and again to extol war and glorify all its merciless outrages. From the days of Gideon and his use of harlot spies, all through the ages of patriarchal and Exodus invasions and despoilers of alien lands, into historic times of constant Christian conquests, through "punitive" expeditions against countries like Holland, which would not submit to a creed it had reason to hate, and—the facts are familiar—in the "World War" every minister of spiritual munitions was a recruiting sergeant for the actual army because he could quote his Bible to guarantee that God was on "Our" side.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

### Prayers for Rain Ridiculed by a Cleric

In the Grafton District (N.S.W., Australia), we have been having a drought, with the result that the clergy of the locality began telling the people that it was due to their sinfulness.

Prayer, therefore, was what they urged—prayer for the cleansing of the collective public soul, and prayer for God's forgiveness and the sending of rain.

From this clerical attitude there was one notable dissentient—Rev. W. Mullan (Presbyterian Church). In a recent sermon, reports of which have been published throughout Australia, he created a sensation among the pulpit spouters by what he had to say on the subject. The following extracts are from a message telegraphed to one of the Sydney dailies—

Prayer is not a magic charm to preserve us from danger and procure us whatever things we desire, said the Rev. Mullan in a sermon at the Grafton Presbyterian Church, on "Why We Should Not Pray for Rain."

To challenge the Almighty—and tie him down to a certain course of inaction—was not prayer, but a demand, and the only purpose it served was to provide cause for ridicule.

Mr. Mullan said he had a good deal of sympathy with people who believed that to pray for fine weather or rain was a simple act of faith, justified by experience.

He would not ask them to give up that belief; but they should be tolerant of the man whose scientific training or education taught him that prayers for interference with the physical order of things seemed childish and absurd.

We all know that in other countries, among savages, there exists a class of picturesque humbugs, known as rain-makers, who—for certain considerations—will bring down rain.

We know they cannot do it; but the mischief is that rain so frequently comes in apparent answer to incantations.

Christians who pray for rain are in the category of heathen rain-makers. Both are on the same level. Anyone with commonsense knows how absurd it would be for someone to pray for fine weather, for a garden party for missions, while farmers watched their perishing crops, and wondered how long it would be before rain fell to save them from destruction.

There is too much loose thinking and loose talking about prayer, which is not dignified, and which borders on the irreverent. People should eliminate the absurd and unreasonable, and pray more for protection from moral and spiritual dangers, and less for personal benefactions and selfish advantages.

The above remarks, of course, are not entirely free from hedging. Possibly, to this Mr. Mullan had to resort, to save his own clerical seat. Still, it is gratifying to find any pulpit-pounder likening his brethren, in their belief in prayers for rain, to primitive, picturesque savages, and reminding them that it was childish and absurd to think they could change the physical order of things by going down on their knees.

The great joke, however, is now to come.

Two days after Mr. Mullan had spoken, in the way above indicated, a Sydney daily came out with a report, under the headings: "Rain Falls—Before Service of Prayer—Drought in Grafton District." Briefly, the particulars that followed were that "solemn services for rain were to be held in Grafton at mid-day on a Tuesday, and that "a heavy shower fell about daylight"—or, some hours before the time fixed for the services!

Through the publicity given them, the remarks by Mr. Mullan were read all over Australia; and then, over the same wide area, was there a smile at the fall of rain before the prayers were uttered.

Such are the developments—in the ordinary course of things, so to speak—that are awakening the public, more and more, to the stupidity and imposture of the church.

Official records show that merely in one of our States—namely, Queensland—no less than 25,000,000 sheep perished within the past ten years through recurring droughts.

It is an agonizing thought—the sufferings of all dumb animals.

The attitude of the Church, however, is that rain is entirely dependent upon God; that at will He sends it or withholds it; and that any undue withholding of it is due to His displeasure with the conduct of some of His human creations.

Clerics, apparently, see nothing wrong with a Divinity, because of the supposed offence of a few, visiting hardship and death on countless other creations—human and animal. A little intelligence would reveal to such preachers that this is a terrifying position in which to place the Almighty. For example, it is inconceivable than any ordinary human being would inflict suffering on the innocent because of a wish to punish the guilty. What, too, of the poor, inoffensive animal world? Limitless are the sufferings they are compelled to endure because of this indiscriminate, all-round principle of punishment.

Briefly, the clergy—presumably without realizing it—make the Almighty a monster of injustice; or, at least, that is how it seems to me.

FRANK HILL.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

Christians are instructed to bear each others burdens. They certainly show full appreciation of each other's deficiencies.—*Quondam*.



## Religion

RELIGION in itself, if undefiled,  
 Were practical, and could be reconciled  
 With evolution and the natural laws  
 Which now prevail, and are themselves the cause;  
 Conducive to our well-being and our good;  
 Integrity of man- and woman-hood;  
 Which might be brought into the daily life  
 Of every prudent man and patient wife;  
 Assisting in adversity and pain,  
 Teach us to live for love and not for gain,  
 To give each other happiness and love,  
 And not expect them dropping from above;  
 To be, in short, what every mortal should,  
 And seek his brother's welfare, not his blood;  
 If such religion possibly could be,  
 Then should we all unite and all agree!

But this is not religion! We but make  
 In thinking so, a grave, a sad mistake.  
 Religion is at best, a faith, or creed,  
 On which all minds have always disagreed!  
 Of all the thousand sects of creed and doubt,  
 Each one denies and shuts the others out;  
 Hence, these religions, being thus multiplied,  
 Each one a thousand times is stultified!

Let them teach morals and humanity,  
 To teach religion is insanity!  
 In no sense can religion educate,  
 Being ignorance it can but derogate!  
 To foist religion on morality  
 Is to debase your moral quality!  
 Religion is the very soul of strife,  
 But, strictly to the Church and creed confined,  
 It can apply but to the bias'd mind;  
 It cannot teach, it only serves to blind.  
 Yet fain would teach what never can be known,  
 Was born and thrives in ignorance alone!

Religion never did and never can  
 Be of the slightest benefit to man!  
 If some apparent benefit be shown,  
 It must be moral, not religion's own.  
 These seekers after truth loath and despise  
 Her naked form, when thrust before their eyes.  
 Good, their intentions are, but as for sense  
 With parsons we can very well dispense;  
 Not one of them but has this mental kink,  
 They think they know, but don't know how to think;  
 And for presumption, they're the very pink.

Poor souls, they're not to blame but to be pitied,  
 Religious dope would make us all half-witted.  
 Misled in infancy, mis-bred at College,  
 They see no difference 'twixt dope and knowledge,  
 Being taught to worship, bend the mind to fiction,  
 They now insist, and brook not contradiction.  
 So, let the poor things go their own sweet way,  
 But don't let them abuse and lead astray  
 Th' unwary child you wish to educate,  
 Don't let them swindle you, at any rate.  
 No matter what the pastor may proclaim,  
 Religion is a money-making game.

B. I. BOWERS.

## Branch News

### NORTH LONDON BRANCH

The North London Branch N.S.S., which had held no winter indoor meetings for some time, made a very promising start again last Sunday. Mr. R. B. Kerr was the speaker, and his lecture on the "Delusions of Democracy," was listened to with great interest by an appreciative audience, and caused an interesting discussion. Mr. L. Ebury made an efficient Chairman. It is hoped that the success of this evening will bring Free-thinkers in the Hampstead and surrounding district to-

night (October 18) to hear the debate between Mr. B. Jullen of the Christian Evidence Society and Mr. Ebury, on "Is There a Divine Revelation?" The meetings will be held every Sunday evening at 7.30, at the Primrose Restaurant, 64 Heath Street, close to the Hampstead Underground and a most attractive programme has been prepared by the Secretary, Mr. L. Ellis, 28 Denning Road, Hampstead, N.W.3, who will be glad to send copies of the syllabus to anyone interested or enrol new members. All meetings are free, and both friends and opponents are heartily welcomed.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON

#### OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Mr. L. Ebury. South Hill Park, Hampstead, S.O, Monday, October 19, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Evans, Barnes and Tuson. *Freethinker* on sale at Kiosk. Should be ordered in advance to avoid disappointment. *Freethinker* and *Spain and the Church* on sale outside the Park gates.

#### INDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Primrose Restaurant, 66 Heath Street, Hampstead, N.W.3, One minute from Hampstead Underground Station): 7.30, Debate—"Is There a Divine Revelation?" *Affir.*: B. Jullen (Christian Evidence Society). *Neg.*: L. Ebury (National Secular Society).

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Alexandra Hotel, opposite Clapham Common Station): 7.30, Mr. A. Burrall—"The Alleged Unchangeability of Human Nature."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, John Strachey—"Is Collective Security the Way to Peace?"

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Alic West—"Marxism and Literature."

### COUNTRY

#### OUTDOOR.

NORTH SHIELDS: 7.0, Tuesday, October 20, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

#### INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, near Livery Street): 7.0, Impromptu Debate—"Intervention or Nonintervention in Spain."

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Cobden Hall, Cort Street, Blackburn): 7.30, Impromptu Discussion on—"What is Christian Science?" Literature for sale.

BURNLEY (S.P.F., St. James' Hall): 7.0, Mr. J. Clayton-Edinburgh BRANCH N.S.S. (Pregardeners' Hall, Picardy Place, Edinburgh): 7.0, Mr. T. L. Smith.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (McLellan Galleries, 270 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Mr. J. Harrison Maxwell, M.A., F.S.A., Scot—"What Mean These Cups and Rings." Lantern Lecture, 100 slides.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Picton Hall, Liverpool): 7.0, Chapman Cohen (President of the N.S.S.)—"Some Aspects of Life and Death." Admission free. Reserved seats 15 each.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street): 7.0, Mr. Dakin.

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