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

Views and Opinions

Christian Education

Two or three weeks ago I dealt with the kind of influence that religion, when it has the power, exerts on social life. An article in the *Church Times* for April 9 induces me to return to the subject, if only for one passage in an editorial on "Christian Education." Generally, articles on this subject by Christian writers manage, either through accident or by intention, so to confuse the issues that the casual reader is not likely to see the full implications of such a phrase as "Christian Education." The writer of the article named can be charged with no such ambiguity. He is quite definite in his aim and is also clear in the statements he makes. He emphasizes the point that the teacher of religion must be one who believes and understands Christianity, and that the Christian school will train boys and girls for "the beatific vision of God," a purpose for which "every human being is created." And as the aim is to see that the schools of this country do this, we begin to know where we are.

But the passage that particularly struck me in the article was this:—

There can be little done in the way of religious education until the soul has been brought to realize that we have no power of ourselves to help either ourselves or others.

Now I am far from questioning this as a bottom fact in religious instruction, and particularly in Christian instruction. I am not finding fault with this statement of the aim of Christian teaching, I agree with it; it is not often that the true nature of Christian teaching is so clearly stated.

\* \* \*  
The Foundation Of Christianity

Christianity has always based itself upon two things. These are fear and the helplessness of man. Few creeds have outdone Christianity in its denunciation of the vileness of human nature, and its incap-

acity for betterment by its own efforts. It was this that caused Nietzsche to characterize the morality of Christianity as slave morality. The fundamentally non-social character of Christianity has been crystallized in such an expression as "The world, the flesh, and the devil," with God and heaven as their opposite, and it will be found embodied in all the official creeds. The hopeless criminality of human nature is one of the oldest of Christian teachings

All the same I am quite certain that of all teachings to which a child may be subjected this laid down by the *Church Times* is about the worst. It is not merely wrong, it is bad, damnably bad; and it is bad because it is the exact opposite of what good education should be. No teacher can do much for a child if he fails to instil, more by insinuation than in set terms, that the only person who can really help the pupil is himself. The best that any teacher can do is to indicate the way, and to rouse in a child that independence of character which will enable it to grapple with its problems and solve them in its own way. No teacher would be so absurd as to think he could physically develop the boys under his care by teaching them that they must not run a race or swing a club. It is equally absurd to think that one can develop character by any but similar means. Instead of its being true that we cannot help ourselves, the whole aim of education should be to teach us that ultimately it is by our own strength alone that we can become what we ought to be. But I do not question the Christian character of the advice given by the *Church Times*. On the contrary, I thank the writer for making so clear the basis of a Christian education.

\* \* \*

The Child Or Disaster

There is another aspect of this struggle for the control of education that is worth noting. Until very recent times the Church was not concerned with a fight over the education of the child. The Church was not in doubt as to whether children would grow up religious or not, because that question did not emerge. Up to little more than a century ago, religion formed an integral part of the social environment. Children were, of course, taught the forms of religious worship, but the chances of a child growing up without religion were about equal to his growing up a believer in Voodooism.

It was a change in the general environment that awakened in the priesthood the fear that there was a danger of the child developing beyond them, and also that if they lost the child they had small chance of holding the adult. From that time on, the churches put up a fight for the control of education. They recognized that the nature of the environment had changed, and that the new factors were inimical to the cultivation of Christian, and ultimately of religious, belief. Doctrines that had formerly been accepted blindly were now open to question. The priesthood

found it had to fight hard for what it had formerly gained without struggle. It was realized that the only way to make Christians was to grab the individual while he was young. The only safe policy was to get the child young enough and train him hard enough, so that he would, bar accidents, grow up a good Christian. And even though he did not grow up an ardent supporter of Christianity, yet he might remain a passive one. The virus of religion is not easily eradicated. It bites deep. It was the change in the nature of the social environment that converted every parson into a kid-napper. The Church had for long taught that religion was *above* understanding; it now realized that if it were not acquired *without* understanding it might never be acquired at all.

\* \* \*

### The Past And The Present

Put as briefly as possible the present situation may be described as one that has arisen in consequence of a line of cleavage between inherited religion and contemporary knowledge. The first stage of human history—extending until recent times—finds religious ideas growing out of, and receiving support from social life. The second stage is one in which development has reached a point where growing social life becomes increasingly antagonistic to religion. It is not a question of "pure" or "impure" religion. These phrases are used by knaves to impose on fools, or by those who are still suffering from the effects of their early religious training. It is simply and entirely a question of a clash between two culture stages. The one naturally, almost unconsciously, works for a revision of inherited beliefs and customs; the other strives to perpetuate them as the essential condition of its own existence.

It is for this reason that we find religion everywhere identified with the use of archaic customs, dress, language and ceremonies. Let anyone express a prayer or a doctrinal passage from the Bible in ordinary language and it ceases to impress. It not only ceases to impress, it becomes absurd. All the discussion concerning the film play "Green Pastures" arose from the fact that Biblical and Christian teachings were being expressed in unsophisticated negro dialect. If they had been expressed in the East-end dialect of a hundred years ago they would have sounded just as repulsive. Blasphemy nowadays consists in little more than putting religious beliefs into plain and humorous language. The fantastic dress of a bishop or archbishop serves the same purpose of disguise. Place these men in everyday dress and they become very ordinary and not over-intelligent individuals. At the beginning the trappings of the medicine-men were essential because they were part of the imitative or coercive magic by which the primitive medicine-man secured the well-being of the tribe. Today this archaic dress is part of the means by which the modern medicine-man fools the people. At the forthcoming coronation ceremony the robes of the peers, the costumes of King and Queen, the pantomimic draperies of officiating clergy, will be described as solemn and impressive. Place them on the stage and most people would smile, wear them in the street and people would roar with laughter. Used in a religious procession and for a religious function, they are taken as a matter of course. Call the whole business a circus, and its impressiveness disappears. Give it a religious atmosphere and the carefully rehearsed performers become the centre of a great national corroboree.

The other day, the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead wrote an article in the *Star*, in which he said that the peculiar enunciation and mannerisms and dress of the parson was a "defence-mechanism" due to his modesty. Well, the peculiar speech, dress, and

manner of a parson—which outside a church rouses a smile—is a defence-mechanism, but not in the sense of Mr. Weatherhead's explanation. They are really forms of protection against the undermining influence of modern life. The parson cannot to-day claim superiority over the ordinary man on grounds of greater knowledge, or intelligence, or finer character; and even to claim superiority in the matter of having greater influence with God is impossible *except* in the case of the more primitive of Roman Catholic priests. But a difference in dress and speech and manner does manage to keep alive a feeling that somehow the parson is not as other men. It also helps to keep that feeling alive *with* the parson, and so enables him to live the part as well as act it. Actors will know how important this feeling is to anyone who wishes to carry out a character part with distinction.

The education question offers a simple illustration of this general situation. Consciously or unconsciously religion must fight against the influence of modern life. It did this in earlier times by its control of life in general. But little by little the secularization of life went on, until religion was compelled to surrender its claim to authority. Nothing was left then but to concentrate on the child. If it can get the child, it may have hopes of at least favourably influencing the adult. If it fails here it fails everywhere. The fight for religious education is a fight for the control of civilization. It is the medicine-man versus modern science.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## The Orthodox Offensive

The eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn of the crow."—William Blake.

THE small but fierce tribe of professional Christian Evidence exponents have allies in the newspaper press and in literature. Reverend professors gird at Freethinkers in their portly volumes of theology, and cricketing correspondents, temporarily out of work, appear to try their hands at the same pleasant diversion in the columns of the press. But this "second eleven" of Christian crusaders wear their rue with a difference. Like that placid dachshund which Mark Twain saw in the possession of a sportsman who was taking it out to hunt elephants, they lack bitterness. Probably they also lack other things—the ability to murder the English language, and the power of talking very loudly in the open air.

Nevertheless, I find myself in a rebellious humour. For there is an irritating note of urbane insolence in some of this anti-Freethought propaganda, and more than a note of snobbishness. There is also an echo of the old school-tie manner, reminiscent of the Oxford accent, which has been described jocosely as the attitude of Omnipotence addressing a lodging-house burglar. It is, in all probability, acceptable to those sentimentalists who still cling to the name of Christian, but I imagine it will irritate rather than satisfy other readers of more virile intelligence.

For example. Principal Grant, of Queen's University, Kingston, Canada, lecturing on World Religions, said:—

There are, indeed, persons destitute of religion, just as there are persons destitute of intellect or affections—all alike to be pitied as we pity the deaf, the dumb, or the blind—but normal beings are religious.

This is by no means a solitary note of patronage. An article in a London newspaper, some time ago, reiterated this insolence with some additional embellish-

ments. In the latter instance the writer is as unctuous as Mr. Samuel Pecksniff at breakfast time. He suggests, with tears in his ink, that the fault of the poor, deluded Freethinkers, or rather their misfortune, for they are born that way, is that they lack the religious sense. The unhappy Freethinker, he tells us, resembles the afflicted folk who are "tone-deaf," and "colour-blind," and who cannot understand, let alone enjoy, the delights of music and literature. "He, (the Freethinker) is not able to relish a good dinner; so he finds out all kinds of reasons to prove that dinner is nonsense, and poisonous nonsense at that." This journalist is actually "sorry" for the poor, demented Freethinker, and, in the heat of the argument, loses his temper. "Freethought," he points out with exquisite courtesy, "is found to some extent in all minds save in the two extremes of saints and simpletons." And, since Fleet Street professional pen-pushers are not saints, and never have been saints, it is terrible to reflect to which group this journalist himself belongs.

The simile of the dinner is blatant and ineffectual nonsense. Freethinkers are as able to relish a seven-course dinner as the most exalted archbishop, "with good capon lined"; but they are not quite so credulous as to mistake the menu for the banquet itself. The Christian menu has no correspondence with the meal that is supposed to follow, and the price charged is far too high. A bird in the hand is worth any number in the bush. A very slender chance of profit in an alleged life hereafter does not compensate for mental slavery and clerical exploitation in this life. An honest man, with some regard for human dignity, would hesitate to play fast and loose with his intellect, and accept a creed simply because it appeals to his selfish hopes and fears. Living by faith is an easy and comfortable profession, as the clergy well know. Living on faith however, is a precarious business. The prophet Elijah is said to have lived on food brought him by inspired ravens, and 40,000 clergy in this country alone subsist on the offerings of the pious. The suffering people of Abyssinia and Spain ask their "god" to help them, and the answer is that they die. If there were no other indictment of the Christian Superstition, the awful sufferings of helpless women and children would condemn it.

According to this Christian apologist, the religious sense is but a common faculty, and Christians have little reason to plume themselves as members of a "god's" own aristocracy. The sense of beauty and of wonder, and, indeed the love of æsthetics, are not necessarily religious, but are perfectly natural. How, then, can there be anything "spiritual" in their combination? Is it rational to jibe at the Freethinker as like a man "utterly incapable" of relishing the exquisite savours of "Songs before Sunrise," and as one who prefers the daily paper before Shakespeare's works, when one remembers that Swinburne and Shakespeare were both Freethinkers? It is sheer insolence to make such assertions. Christians have no monopoly of the finer feelings. It is very doubtful if the average hymn has any more claim to be considered as real literature than the usual music-hall song. And the glaring lithographs of Biblical subjects framed in so many Christian homes at least suggest that colour-blindness is not confined to the heterodox. There is more misrepresentation and more slander to come. The writer continues:—

But the man who is convinced that the early martyrs were designing and crafty rogues is, often for some obscure reason, anxious to proclaim his conviction to the world, whereby he becomes a burden and a bore.

This holy simplicity is overdone. Apparently, this Fleet Street journalist has never noticed amateur evangelists with portable harmoniums and girl friends, who

frequent street corners and open spaces. In their case the propagandist reason is not obscure, nor entirely unconnected with the collecting boxes. But this journalist is not quite so childlike and bland as he appears to be. He actually follows the beaten track of theologians in talking of mysteries, which is a petty subterfuge to cover the retreat of a defender of the faith. Here are his words:—

The truth is that, whether we like it or not, we live well, in and through mysteries.

Mysteries, forsooth! And the hired penman has not illuminated them with his camouflage of controversy. Wishing to keep religion in mystery, or obscurity, he objects to explanations. He cannot tolerate that men should talk of these things too enquiringly. Even if the critics are right, the subject is taboo. The older theologians were definite; the modern defenders of the faith stammer and splutter. As man advances, the "gods" become more evanescent. With each increase of our knowledge of Nature the sphere of the "supernatural" is lessened. Presently people will find that deities and devils are but the reflections of man's imagination, and symbols of his ancient ignorance.

When the Sultan of Zanzibar sent a second-hand tramp steamer to sink the British fleet, a hearty laugh rang through the civilized world. These puerile attempts at Christian evidence are equally exhilarating. "Is it reasonable," asks our critic, "to spend time in reading about Mr. Pickwick, who never existed?" Christians, it might be retorted, worship a being who never existed, and support forty thousand clergymen in ease and comfort to perpetuate the divine comedy. There is a whole world of difference between the Freethinker, who labours for rational progress, and the hired journalist, who turns theologian for half an hour, to bolster up the delusions of faith. We do not grudge him his thirty pieces of silver, which should be the rate for his attacks on Freethinkers, many of whom have grown grey in the service of humanity.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Native Faith of Pondoland

In her attractive work, *Reaction to Conquest*, Oxford University Press, Dr. Monica Hunter has given us an elaborate description of Pondoland and its people. A volume of 574 closely printed pages, it is well illustrated and indexed and contains a glossary of Xosa words utilized in the text. It is also a solid contribution to social and anthropological science. In his foreword to this book, General Smuts declares that its author possesses "exceptional qualifications for her task. Not only has she been trained in the most modern and up-to-date methods of research, but she was brought up at Lovedale—the great native educational centre of South Africa not far from Pondoland. She has therefore an understanding of the native mind and native ways which is not often found in the case of researchers into native sociology."

Pondoland is a small strip of coastland near Natal, and, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, this coast was the scene of many shipwrecks, and numerous mariners of European and Asiatic origin who escaped drowning passed through the country or even settled among the natives—and married Pondo women. There is still a clan which claims descent from Oriental sailors who were saved from their wrecked vessel, while another clan bears obvious traces of European admixture. But these strangers became so completely absorbed in the life and customs of the people

that no sign of Aryan or Oriental culture is now discernible.

Yet, despite this foreign infusion, Pondoland was less influenced by alien contact than any other South African native territory and its inhabitants were the last of the Cape tribes to be placed under British administration. Their isolation was also preserved by the nature of the territory. Dr. Hunter notes: "The remote geographic position, the broken character of the coastal belt, and the heavy rainfall all hindered the development of transport. There are still only two main roads in Pondoland, and these are sometimes impassable."

In these circumstances, Pondoland's comparative security from outside influence renders the natives most excellent material for anthropological purposes. Their religion has been less tintured by Christian contact than that of other Bantu tribes, and the primitive faith is almost intact. Missionaries there were, and are, but 10 per cent only of the Pondos are even nominally Christian. As Smuts remarks: "Into this Arcadia came first the missionary, with the disturbing influence which Christianity must necessarily have on the native outlook and way of life. As, however, about 90 per cent of the Pondos are still pagans, it cannot be said that this influence has gone very deep yet. . . . To the ancient native life the traders dotted over Pondoland have proved a far more potent factor of change than the missionary." This economic impact has become more greatly pronounced since the country's annexation in 1894.

Death is an ever recurring mystery to the mind of the Pondo, and life's ending is signaled by the wailing of the survivors. The corpse contains *mana*, is dangerous, and is buried immediately. In earlier times, the old men say, the remains were placed in a circular hole in a squatting posture. Now, a grave is usually made with a shelf on one side and the corpse is placed upon it and then covered with clods. Recently, however, the Christian mode of coffin-interment has gained ground, and stones and thorns are placed over it to protect it from witchcraft. Near kin of the deceased constantly visit the grave to assure themselves that it remains undisturbed.

The personal possessions of the departed are deposited with the body, with the exception of sharp or pointed implements which may perhaps be used to injure the living when the dead native becomes an ancestral shade (*ithongo*). Maize, millet and pumpkin seeds are scattered over the sepulchre by the undertaker, and while thus engaged he offers a prayer for a bountiful harvest.

It is denied that the dead man's effects placed in his grave are intended for use in the spirit realm. These things are deemed impure, and they harbour an evil. Hence, their banishment. In answer to Dr. Hunter's query whether these buried utilities were of service to the dead the natives said: "We want to get these things out of sight because their owner is no longer here." This, of course, may have been mere evasion. In any case, if the flesh of an animal sacrificed for a sick man's recovery is not all eaten before his death, it must be devoured by the dogs. The flesh of the sacrifice became the dead native's property and was consequently contaminated by his decease.

This taint of death originally cursed the hut in which any person had passed away, and the dwelling was destroyed by fire. But now when a child or unmarried native dies, the hut is usually swept and garnished merely. Still, when its owner or her spouse dies it is invariably burnt to the ground.

When pregnant females or those suckling infants join the majority the husband must not touch the corpse or aid in preparing the grave. After the burial, all the mourners cleanse themselves in a stream. An

animal is slaughtered and the gravediggers who are defiled by contact with the body are anointed with, and cleanse their hands with the contents of the gall bladder of the slain beast. Agricultural work is suspended on the day of death, and friends gather to eat the flesh of the sacrifice.

A three day's seclusion is observed, and then beer is made, the usual life being resumed by all save the widow. The most careful precautions are taken to disarm the pollution of death. Dr. Hunter states that: "Widows, widowers, parents of children who have died, women who have had miscarriages and men who have buried a corpse wash with purifying medicines." Charms are employed for the same purpose, while the widow shaves her head and a widower his scalp and beard.

The natives generally, are firmly persuaded that these purificatory rites are indispensable if illness and death are to be avoided. A Pondo named Dula, who had been influenced by foreign scepticism refused to sacrifice an animal to ensure his mother's well-being when his father died and scoffed at the idea of the *amathongo* (ancestral spirits) and the mother became ill. A diviner declared that her malady was influenced by the ancestral shades of her husband's family, but Dula scouted the story and made no offering. The mother died, probably in consequence of her own misgivings. But with natives, as with the more civilized, the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy widely prevails. What was to be expected when the immemorial customs of the tribe had been wantonly ignored!

So uncanny seems death that the Pondos carefully avoid all reference to mortality. The name of one recently defunct is never uttered. Children are forbidden all reference to those who have just died, and it is deemed the worst possible taste to introduce the theme of mortality in conversation. Dr. Hunter experienced considerable difficulty in gathering her information concerning it, although trading and missionary influences appear to have lessened the aversion to the subject, so long universal.

The theory of a future state peopled with spirits who preserve an interest, and possess power over the living is a dominating feature of native religion. One native contended that the breath becomes an ancestral spirit at death "because that is what leaves a man when he dies." Other natives expressed different views, and there is no official dogma. Dr. Hunter concludes that: "Since the living person is a potential *ithongo* (ancestral spirit) there is no hiatus between death and the possibility of the deceased influencing his descendants. There is no idea of a child existing before conception, or of reincarnation. *Amathongo* help their descendants, but are not re-embodied in them."

The ancestral shades are less baneful than beneficial to the living. They watch all that occurs in earthly affairs, and may confer prosperity on man and his domesticated animals. When kindly disposed they increase the crops and protect their children from injury in times of trouble. They are thanked for their services when a hunt proves successful and, in fine, the guardian spirits are a flowing fountain of blessings when favourable, but woe awaits the men whose *amathongo* take offence.

It is instructive to note that any belief in a god supreme over the ancestral deities is entirely absent in Pondoland. On very questionable evidence, Father Schmidt and a few other anthropologists find traces of a dim belief in a supreme deity among certain lowly tribes. On the other hand, Dr. Hunter emphatically states: "That there is no proof that the Pondo, before contact with Europeans, believed in the existence of any Supreme Being, or beings, other than the *amathongo*. They had two words, *um dali* (creator, *ukulala*, to mould, to form) and *umenzi* (maker: *ukwen-*

za, to make), which might suggest a belief in a creator, but there is no system of rites or complex of beliefs connected with these words."

T. F. PALMER.

## On Genesis

### I.

CONSIDERING the tremendous importance which Christianity must attach to *Genesis*, it is rather surprising one finds so few references to it in our religious press. I have been reading a good many religious journals for many years, but, unless a correspondent has sent an enquiry about the book, the references are very rare and casual. Yet the whole basis of Christianity rests on the Fall of Man and the Saviourship of Jesus. No Fall of Man, no Saviour; and no Saviour means that Christ is inexplicable. Of course, no genuine believer in true Christianity would for a moment give up Jesus as the Saviour. For him the Fall of Man was as real an event as the rising and setting of the sun is to him nowadays; and he is bound to accept the story of Adam and Eve, the Serpent, the Tree of Knowledge, the Garden of Eden, the Expulsion and all the other well-known details. But he does not talk too much about his belief in these things. It is so much more effective to dwell on the absolute perfection of Jesus and his teaching, and insist that, if only we accepted this teaching in all its literalness, the evils which beset this difficult world of ours would vanish like a pancake among hungry boys.

But for the student of Christian and religious origins, *Genesis* still remains. Who wrote it, when was it written, have we got it exactly as it left the unique author's hand, is it a patch-work of myth and legend, or is it a Revelation from God Almighty? These questions have been asked for centuries; they have occupied the labours of thousands of theologians; and we are not very much nearer to a solution of some of the problems raised than we were a hundred years ago.

For the earnest believer, Jew or Christian, *Genesis* is a direct revelation from God; and for the Christian, it foreshadows all sorts of things connected with Christ. This is where Jew and Christian part company as the former vehemently protests against the claim that anything whatever is "predicted" in *Genesis* about Jesus. In this he is, of course, right. What happened is, that the gospel writers simply took certain statements in *Genesis*, wrote them into the life of their deity, and then calmly said they were prophecies! The wonder is that they managed to hoodwink millions of people in this way. I have a shrewd suspicion that the really clever men in the Church were never taken in, whatever they may have been obliged to say in public. The fraud is too gross and palpable.

During the nineteenth century, when education became more universal, and people began to read for themselves instead of being told in sermons what to believe, every effort was made to keep them in the fold. In this country, large numbers of Bible dictionaries and apologetic works in general were published. Learned commentaries were got up for the clergy and the scholar, and simpler but similar works for the laity. One can spend a very pleasant and profitable few hours in comparing the statements made by the venerable and reverend writers of fifty or one hundred years ago, with some of the conclusions which are being forced on to orthodox commentators in these days.

For example, that very pious but extremely able man, John Cassell, was, I think, responsible for an ultra-orthodox *Bible Dictionary*. In it can be

found the most credulous beliefs I have discovered for many a long day. To read it is one continuous chuckle. We can see what dignified and learned clergymen really believed in during good Victoria's reign—a reign, by the way, full of the most outrageous examples of savage treatment against what used to be called the "lower classes." Cassell's *Bible Dictionary* tells us that:—

The book of *Genesis* is at once the most interesting and the most ancient document in the world. Its subject, as the name implies, is the origin of the world and man; it shows how this earth was gradually prepared for man's use, how man was placed upon it, and under what conditions; how he fell and became subject to sin and death; how God gave him the promise of deliverance; and how, gradually, preparation was made for the fulfilment of that promise by the setting apart of one family and one nation to be its especial guardians. But besides this . . . it further gives us the sole credible information which we possess respecting man's primeval history.

It would prove an interesting enquiry to find out how many modern churchmen and theologians would subscribe to this particular nonsense. Would even a Roman Catholic priest? One, with whom I had a discussion some years ago, told me the Roman Catholic Church was *not* opposed to evolution as such; only to some of the less credible statements made by evolutionists.

Leaving aside what heretics like Spinoza and others have said, the point of view expressed by the writer in Cassell's *Bible Dictionary* was never agreed to by the majority of his contemporaries. Many of them protested against leaving reason on the doorstep when entering the House of Faith. Even such an orthodox writer as Dr. J. B. Lightfoot had to declare: "The abnegation of reason is not the evidence of faith, but the confession of despair. Reason and reverence are natural allies." But once admit reason, once let faith pass by and *Genesis* becomes exactly like any other literary work—subject to criticism; and criticism is fatal to both faith and religion.

*Genesis* has been most minutely examined by scores of writers. Every word, every syllable, has been placed under the microscope, so to speak. The amount of labour expended in expounding and examining the various meanings given by believers and translators to each word must be colossal. The Hebrew has been compared with the Greek of the Septuagint, and with other translations in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, as well as various Oriental dialects. If the reader wants a very brief glance at the way in which commentators have worked to understand the book, he should get hold of that famous old work Jennings's *Jewish Antiquities*, which gives a mine of information on hundreds of controversial points. And the beauty of it all is that, except for the fact that even the very pious have been forced to concede that *Genesis* is packed with legend and myth, mostly copied from legends and myths of other ancient races, we are no nearer an explanation now than we were before. Nobody knows who wrote *Genesis*; nobody knows when it was written; nobody knows who were the various editors who gathered together all sorts of manuscripts—that is, if ever there were any. Nobody knows who invented the special square-letter Hebrew script in which *Genesis* is always written. And there are many other mysteries connected with this book which are quite unsolved. It should prove interesting to examine some of the more modern judgments on *Genesis* which exercised such a profound influence on the Christian faith—nay, in all probability which is actually responsible for it.

H. CUTNER.

## The Prohibition of Thought

EVERY innovating thought throughout the tardy stages of our culture history has been assailed and condemned by the majority. The dread of ideas is a savage heritage. Lord Melbourne typified the reactionary legislator when he remarked to the advocates of reform: "Why can't you leave it alone?"

Probably the first primitive man who counselled the removal of filth from the immediate vicinity of the cave was regarded as an enemy of society. Neophobia, fear of the new, may be said to be universal, and it survives today even among many of the educated minority in the advanced nations.

Legal suppression of rational discussion of the strongest instinct in humanity is the theme of an extended inquiry by Alec Craig in his book, *The Banned Books of England*, which is just published by Allen & Unwin. It is apparent to all who are interested in the betterment of human affairs that a growing tendency in this country to redeem sex love from ignorance, misery, degradation and cruelty has excited vigilance among those persons in our community, who still associate sin with the expression of the second of the primary impulses of mankind.

Curiosity about sex is the most natural of all urging to inquiry, and is at the basis of a further desire for knowledge. This craving to know manifests itself among every intelligent child in the nursery, and is powerfully stimulated at the age when the adolescents of both sexes begin to experience the emotion of love. The predominant note in Alec Craig's book is a plea for a higher perception of the great significance of sex love in its sociological and ethical bearings. This "central problem of life," as Havelock Ellis rates it, is ever with us, and in ways that only the informed recognize clearly.

Dr. S. Ely Jelliffe says rightly that to the vulgar mind the physical sex act is "about all that is meant by sex." What can we expect when we reflect that sex "knowledge" for the mass had been gained from smutty stories and the crude speculations of school companions?

The chief aim of a large proportion of those responsible for the moral training of the young is to discourage any inquiry connected with the impulse that perpetuates the race and sways the personality to happiness or misery.

How shall we, the young especially, learn how to live a true joy-giving love-life? Alec Craig maintains that the one thing essential is *sex education*. He writes: "There are many people in this country to-day rational and civilized in a general way, who, when a sexual proposition is presented to them, blush, stutter, become irrational, hysterical and even violent. Their reaction is precisely that of the average fifteenth century man presented with a rational argument on transubstantiation."

It is the victim of sex-dread who when fired by revolt against a normal impulse, sets about police measures for the total suppression of sex enlightenment. He would "leave the matter to instinct," without realizing that, as Sir James Paget pointed out many years ago, in a lecture to medical students, an immense number of civilized people have lost the instinct that directs the lower animals, mechanically and unerringly.

The writer of *Banned Books* holds that modern fiction is a medium of instruction for a great many of the young who stand in need of experience of life, and are bewildered by the problems of love. Bernard Shaw has emphasized the value of the novel from the instructional standpoint, and has commended the work of that tragically misunderstood author, D. H. Lawrence.

What are the books that yield a measure of instruction to the young? The Bureau of Social Hygiene, in America, has collected the data of personal sex information from 1,200 women college graduates. Seventy-two out of one hundred and fifty-five students were partly enlightened by books. Among the varied literary sources are encyclopedias, Shakespeare, Thackeray, George Eliot, Scott, and Dickens.

If there is peril to the soul in the pages of George Eliot—and all sex knowledge is considered perilous by some persons—why do we not ban that writer's novels? The fact is, any rational agreement of view as to which books should be suppressed, and which should not, cannot be

obtained. There is not a really comprehensible definition of purity that can be accepted by the intelligent or illiterate.

E. M. Forster, who has written a foreword to Alec Craig's volume, states that a constable suggested prosecution for "the telling of improper stories in a public house." This would be at least logical from a common-sense standpoint. But there is no reliable definition of obscenity, and, as E. M. Forster adds, the result is the banning of "works of literary merit and scientific value."

How far should the demand for reform in censorship go? There is a difference of view among the educated class. Some would advocate abolition of any form of censorship. Others would only proscribe obviously pornographic books.

Another group would allow "expression of opinion couched in restrained language." Rabelaisian stories, according to the opinions of some writers, do no harm to the healthy-minded. D. H. Lawrence, who has been denounced for following the example of Chaucer and Shakespeare, and using the common terms of a great mass of the populace, was repelled by vulgar pornography, which he described as "an insult to the human spirit."

While scientific books, written by men and women of earnest mind, are continually attacked by the State, there is meagre hope for the lessening of avid longing for meretricious lewd books. It is instructive that the boys or girls of the co-education schools in England, who are sensibly enlightened upon the rudimentary phenomena of the sex life, lose interest in "dirty talk." Sanity in sex teaching, as Alec Craig points out, would soon remove the attitude of mind which revels in obscurity, and would banish the necessity for censorship.

As the law stands a psychological work such as Dr. Iwan Bloch's *Sexual Life of Our Time* is considered unfit for publication at a price within the means the majority of the people.

Among the censored authors we find the names of Swedenberg, John Addington Symonds, Havelock Ellis, Proust, Defoe, Huysman and Voltaire. In recent cases of prosecution, the testimony of a number of eminent living scientists, physicians, and social workers, concerning the educative value of indicted books, has been set aside. Among these witnesses are Professor Julian Huxley, Dr. Robert Briffault, Lady Winstedt, Professor Malinowski, Professor J. B. S. Haldane, Dr. Maude Royden, Mrs. Janet Chance, and Professor J. C. Flügel.

*The Banned Books of England* should be read by every citizen who stands for the principle of free speech in vital matters, and is zealous for the well being of the community. There are signs of the times that call for vigilance in protecting the right defended by Milton "to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience." In his Romanes Lecture at Oxford, in 1935, Professor Gilbert Murray, referring to the change of thought upon the sexual relationship since the Victorian age, said: "Here are a whole host of new problems intimately affecting the social life of millions of people which will some day have to be faced." The author of *The Banned Books of England* has shown us how necessary at the present time it is to face these problems intelligently. Professor Freud condemns the legal attitude of the prohibitors of thought. Alec Craig is of the opinion that: "It is surely in the public interest that any case in which the publication of a book is defended on the ground that it is of artistic, scientific, educational or social value should be heard in the High Court. In such cases far more than the private rights or wrongs of publisher, bookseller or author is at stake: something nothing less than the welfare and reputation of English literature and learning."

WALTER M. GALLICIAN.

Looking at the whole course of human history, and noting how the vilest and most ruinous practices have been associated with religion, and have ever relied upon religion for support, the cause for speculation is, not what will happen to the world when religion dies out, but how human society has managed to flourish while the belief in the gods ruled.—Chapman Cohen.

## Acid Drops

Sir G. E. W. Bowyer, M.P., has written to the Women's Co-operative Guild (Bucks) that he does not agree with the abolition of the birching of child offenders. He says the schools that he went to birched the pupils and it did the pupils good. Further, he has two boys at school, and he would be "very sorry to think that no corporal punishment was provided." All one need say is that the condemnation of the practice is found in its effects on Captain Bowyer. Brutality begets brutality all the world over, and when a man looks at himself and decides that birching did him good, one can only think that he is a first-class example of the evil of the method. If birching is so good and Sir G. E. W. Bowyer is pleased with the results when he contemplates its product in himself, it is surprising he does not advocate its use on a very wide scale. For example, if birching stops a boy doing wrong, after he has been guilty of a first offence, why not birch a boy on entering school so that he will not do wrong, and repeat the dose once a month to prevent his ever straying into wrong paths?

We like to have the Christian idea of things made quite clear. For this reason we thank the *Church Times* for enlightening us on the question of marriage and divorce. Thus:—

The Christian law of marriage was not instituted by Our Lord as something new. He claims for it that it was so "from the beginning" when "male and female created he them."

That is very definite. When God made Adam and Eve, at the beginning, he intended there should be no divorce, and although in these days of evolution we are told that man and woman came into existence rather late in the day, and no one can say when the developing animal became man or woman, still it must be accepted that God then laid down the Church law of marriage, because it was endorsed by a celibate preacher some two thousand years ago. But as according to the same "blessed book" if Adam and Eve had not broken the divine law there might never have been an opportunity for Adam to divorce Eve, it looks as though the condition of keeping one "divine law" was that another "divine law" had to be broken. The case looks puzzling, particularly as the chief God in this religious medley later gave instructions that if a man's wife did not find favour in his eyes he might give her a "bill of divorcement" and send her about her business. Anyway, between the one and the other, we must assume that the conditions of married life were fixed for ever, a long, long time ago, by a God who was a wifeless husband with a son the same age as himself. In the name of God we must accept it, although what the devil it all means is rather puzzling.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has a kindred spirit in King Carol. His brother, Prince Nicholas, like Edward, wished to marry a divorced woman. Like the Archbishop, the King objected. Also like the Archbishop, the King would have raised no objection whatever had he made the lady his mistress, but to marry her shocked his sense of religious morality. So, as King Edward had to either drop the idea of marrying Mrs. Simpson or abdicate, King Carol, full of religious zeal, has forced his brother to renounce his titles and income. We are expecting the Archbishop to send King Carol a letter congratulating him on so splendidly vindicating and illustrating Christian morality. If a Christian King has a fancy for a divorced woman, custom has provided a plan by which that fancy may be gratified. Let him live with her, and the Christian conscience will be content. Monarchs and mistresses have more than an alliterative association. But Marriage?—well, there are limits to what the Christian conscience can stand—as Arch. Cant. (to follow the American abbreviation of Dr. Lang's titles) has shown.

According to Mr. A. G. Gardiner—unless it be the joke of the printer of a recent article of his—the Russian

Atheists' League "has sunk from 6,000,000 to 000,000 in the last four years." Of course, it is extremely difficult to give satisfactory statistics when trying to arrive at an under-estimate of something with which one entirely disagrees, but 000,000 is a "safe" figure. It is Mr. Gardiner's opinion that the Vatican will bring Hitler to heel, that religion is actually reviving in Russia, that Mussolini was discreet in making terms with the Pope, and that Mustafa Kemal has not antagonized the church in Turkey while "reforming" it. How amusing it is to mark the eagerness of non-conformity to associate itself with Roman Catholicism in the struggle to keep any sort of religion alive! Let Mr. Gardiner's opinion be counted another *cipher* to his figures.

The Chapel Royal—this ancient edifice will shortly be re-opened for the performance of divine service, having undergone a thorough repair and re-embellishment.

This is a reprint from the *Observer* of March 20, 1837. "Performance" is *still* the appropriate word.

Thieves stole a safe containing £500 from the home of the Rev. Henry Boyle, parish priest of Desertmartin, Co. Derry. The sum included 300 sovereigns and £100 in five-shilling pieces.

A curious haul from a parsonage, some might think. Gold pieces and crowns are rather rare currency these days. Perhaps the good priest was taking care of the little hoards of parishioners who had taken too little heed of the warning that thieves may "break through and steal." Perhaps. The laying-up of treasures on earth has met with its scriptural fate, and a good text for the Sunday Sermon in Desertmartin has been furnished.

In case it is not so well known as it ought to be, readers perhaps would like to be sure—on the word of a pious Catholic—that "the Coronation oil is always solemnly blessed according to an ancient form." This ought to make the oil doubly or even trebly effective. Perhaps a few extra blessings will help the good cause a little more. It ought to be added that the oil is not just a simple oil; it is "mixed with special ingredients," which surely should be very pleasing to the Lord.

The same authority tells us that "before the Coronation of Edward VII., the old recipe was mislaid." Whether Edward VII. was obliged to have the real stuff is not known; but Canon Wordsworth managed to get the correct recipe made up, and enough was left for George V., and there may be still enough for George VI. These intimate details of the blessed oil surely prove the close connexion between Church and Kingship; or even the old connexion between the medicine-man and the head-magician.

According to the *Church Times*, the Coptic Christians are being constantly persecuted in Abyssinia by the victorious Italians. One bishop has been executed and that great military genius, Marshal Graziani, said to an assemblage of Coptic priests, "If these embarrassments are not stopped by you at once, the Italian Government will have to annihilate you all." The *Church Times* thinks, this is really due to the alliance between Roman Catholicism and Fascism, for "Abyssinia is teeming with Roman Catholic missionaries." But Fascism does not seem to like the same religion in Germany—to put the case mildly.

The truth is that the Roman Church is following the same general policy that is characteristic of the Christian Church as a whole. The Roman Church has no political or social theory of its own, save that the Church must be supreme; and it is ready to support any movement that will support it. For some time it was coquetting with the Soviet Government. In Germany it supported Nazism until Nazism opposed the Church. Another fact is that the Nazis, who were formerly mostly Lutherans, have always been the enemies of Roman Catholicism;

while in Italy, this religion was practically without a rival. This explains the two attitudes; and it also explains why we consider religion—any religion—a curse.

The same journal, every now and then, loves to tell its readers that Atheism—which it generally labels Victorian Atheism—is either dead or *demodé*; while poor old Agnosticism “does not suit a cock-sure generation.” We have an idea that readers of this kind of “cock-sureness” are not quite so simple as to believe all they read. They have only to go along any highway and they will see, if they look for it, far more Atheism than there ever was in Bradlaugh’s day, far more genuine unbelief, and far more rank indifference. The day is over when such talk as “Without Him there is no hope,” etc., would convert even a few half-wits. A religious writer in the *Times*—which ought to know better than to admit such stuff—is quoted as saying, “Multitudes are turning from hopes that have failed to the religion of the Cross which cannot fail.”

The word “multitudes” is a gem; we wonder whether even a single intelligent reader of the *Times* could point out where these “multitudes” are. Except where a particularly eloquent preacher can gather a crowd—of believers—most churches are almost empty Sunday after Sunday; and the only consolation the Church can give itself is that “multitudes” listen-in to the wireless religious services. The Cross, of course, has utterly failed; and the *Church Times*’ own columns week after week prove that unquestionably.

The Baptists have refused to amalgamate with the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians. This momentous decision in the affairs of man was come to because while the Baptists look upon Baptism as a confession of faith and a means of grace; the Congregationalists don’t care much more than two hoots for baptism. In fact, shocking as it may seem, quite a number of their ministers are even unbaptized. Of course, there may be other reasons. For example, the Baptists are mostly thorough-going Fundamentalists; while the Congregationalists are—many of them, anyway—quite prepared to go along Modernist lines. And that is the road to Hell—according to Baptists. No, Christians don’t love each other’s doctrines—yet.

The Rev. Price Evans, of the Crane Street Baptist Church, Pontypool, is given a column in the *Free Press of Monmouthshire*. He says, among other things, that “Of the historical existence of Jesus Christ there is no shadow of doubt. Those who deny it are convicted of either intellectual incompetence or moral perversity.” The Reverend gentleman reminds us of St. Paul, who said in Cor. xv. 6, that Jesus “was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.” Some people imagine they can manufacture evidence by a stroke of the pen.

A writer in the same paper boosts the Muller Orphanage as existing for over fifty years with all their financial requirements being met by prayer. This he says is a proof that “God answers prayer if we fulfil the conditions that are laid down in Holy Scriptures.” One of these conditions, evidently, is that people like “F.J.A.,” write regularly to the Press, pointing out that Muller and his workers “are asking help of God, and in secret.” Cut out all this public advertising and the effect of secret prayers could be gauged. Is it possible that “F.J.A.” does not see that he is only one of the numerous publicity agents?

The New Zealand *Truth Seeker* continues to add brightness to our lives by reprinting testimonials to the value of Prayer, “under the right conditions.” They obtain them from the columns of *Filipinas*, a publication bearing the imprimatur of the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, a gentleman undoubtedly “consecrated to God,” having been correctly fingered and generously oiled by those qualified to do so.

A few of the testimonials are appended:—

11,604. Through the “Votive Lamp” I asked that we should have no trouble in getting a house. I had no difficulty in getting one at half the price we expected to pay, thanks to the Sacred Heart and St. Jude.

11,877. I promised to get a “Votive Lamp” burnt if my sister obtained work, or a Catholic husband. Imagine my surprise when I had a letter from her saying she was shortly to be married.

11,885. My son won a prize in the State Lottery after making two offerings.

2,403. Please find enclosed an offering for a “Votive Lamp.” I was greatly worried because I had a still-born baby, but now I have given birth to twins.

23,919. I asked for two weeks that I should win the ladies’ singles tennis championship, and promised an offering if I were successful. I am happy to say I did win.

What is “The Votive Lamp”? “It is a lamp placed before the Altar, and is lovingly tended by the careful hands of those consecrated to God.” An offering of Five Shillings is requested for a limited placing of the wish under the Votive Lamp, but by sending a pound it will remain under the lamp for a whole month, and have a correspondingly greater chance of catching the Lord’s eye. The Five Shillings and Pound Donations reach the “careful hands of those consecrated to God.” In a special department, non-Catholics may send offerings and reap the same advantages. For a bigger sum, one’s name can be inscribed in an album and so obtain post-mortem advantages. The relative folly of spending money on gravestones or flowers for the dead is pointed out. Nuff sed!

It is announced that Charlie Chaplin films are to be banned in Italy. There is a seriousness in the work of Chaplin, as there is with all first-class humorists, and the modern representatives of the Grandeur that was Rome seem to have become aware of the fact. Chaplin humanizes whilst others look for salvation from Masses and Poison Gas. Walt Disney will perhaps be the victim of the next pronouncement. His *Father Noah* was devoid of all reverence.

In a letter sent to the *Daily Telegraph*, we read the following:—

If you want intelligent men to be convinced of the truth of what they are to preach, then obviously your theology must be intelligible and truthful. In my submission orthodox theology is neither of these things, and that is the real reason why the intellectual standard of many of our younger clergy is not a high one.

Your own correspondence columns have shown, within the last week or two, what is the reaction of an intelligent young man to present-day theological training.

So “intelligence and truth” are to be amongst the ingredients of the new Theology. This is revolution; certainly not a “recall to religion.” “One cannot put new wine into old bottles.”

## Fifty Years Ago

PROFESSOR HUXLEY has some moderate words in defence of his criticism of Canon Liddon which are worth reprinting. He says: “Establishment has its duties as well as its rights. The clergy of a State Church enjoy many advantages over these of unprivileged and unendowed religious persuasions; but they lie under correlative responsibility to the State and to every member of the body politic. I am not aware of any sacredness attached to sermons. If preachers stray beyond the doctrinal limits set by lay lawyers, the Privy Council will see to it; and if they think fit to use their pulpits for the promulgation of literary, or historical, or scientific errors, it is not only the right but the duty of the humblest layman, who may happen to be better informed, to correct the evil effects of such perversion of the opportunity which the State affords them, and such misuse of the authority which it lends them.”

*The Freethinker*, April 17, 1887.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No. : CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. SAMSON.—We believe that the owner of Thomas Paine's house in Lewes, Mr. Every, has presented the building to the Sussex Archaeological Trust. This should preserve the house in perpetuity.

R. MASON.—Your previous letter was not received. Our business manager is writing concerning supplies of *Age of Reason*.

H. SHAW.—Only members are eligible to attend the business meeting of the Conference. If you are already a member you can get your card by writing the Secretary. We note your advice that everyone who wishes to grasp the Free-thought position should read our *Grammar of Freethought*. Consider the advice handed on, as you wish.

W. MARSHALL.—You will find much information on the question of Church revenues in Alan Handsacre's *The Revenues of Religion*, which can be obtained from this office.

W. L. DEWAR.—Thanks for interesting letter. Always pleased to hear from you. We are well, but could do with a rest for a time. Must try to take one after Whitsun.

T. RAWLINS.—We share your high appreciation of the writings of Santayana. He is of the right stuff, and his materialism is unquestionable.

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

*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.*

*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.*

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

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

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

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

## Sugar Plums

It is now four weeks to the Annual Conference of the N.S.S. at Liverpool, and branch secretaries, delegates, and visitors, should make sure that necessary requirements receive attention without delay. A successful Conference involves a lot of work behind the scenes for the local secretary as well as at Headquarters, and that work is increased by those who leave things until the last minute. A lunch will be arranged for the Conference Sunday, and those who intend being there should write the General Secretary as early as possible. An excursion for the Monday following the Conference may also be arranged.

Mr. A. S. Crump writes:—

Many congratulations for the noble effort of producing Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, at the modest sum of fourpence; may its appearance help to bring enlightenment to those people of an enquiring mind.

As a Unitarian I have much in common with Paine's mode of living, and trust that his ideals and common sense are shared by Freethinkers and Deists alike.

The above is one of the very many letters we have had concerning our edition of Paine's great work. We are glad to have Mr. Crump's letter as coming from one who

is not exactly with us. And we take the opportunity of pressing upon all who can do so to help in extending the sales of this volume. It is one of the best introductions to our movement, and will appeal to those who are still hanging on to Christianity. Many friends may induce their newsagents to show copies, and in that case a sale is assured. Terms will be supplied on application. Large as is the edition we have published, it is quite likely we may have to republish before the year is out—in that case at a slightly advanced price. The sale has far exceeded our anticipations up to now, but it has made us greedy for a still larger distribution of this Free-thought classic. We may even follow it with a cheap edition of *The Rights of Man*.

A Bill for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws was introduced in the House of Commons, on April 12 by Mr. Thurtle. We, of course, wish the Bill every success. But the kind of Government that we have in power is more likely to strengthen the Blasphemy Laws than abolish them. Freethinkers have to thank Mr. Thurtle for his persistency in continuing a fight for a Bill that a great many members would be afraid to introduce, even though they were in agreement with it.

In this column for March 28 we printed a letter which purported to be taken from the *Sheffield Star*, signed by "Owd Jack." We received the cutting in the usual way, and although the actual cutting from a newspaper was sent, the name of paper from which it was said to be taken was written in ink, but no date was given. There was no reason to think that any mistake was made in writing the name of the paper, and there seems no obvious reason why anyone should mislead. The genuineness of the document as a newspaper cutting was unquestionable. But we have received a letter from the editor of the *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star*, in which he says that he can trace no such letter in his paper. We regret very much if any mistake has been made with regard to the paper from which the cutting was taken, and apologize to the editor for any annoyance that has been caused. Meanwhile we shall be pleased if the sender of the cutting will be good enough to inform us the date and paper from which the clipping was taken. Failing that, perhaps some other Sheffield reader may remember the letter. It was signed "Owd Jack," Mexborough Common, and headed "Foodstuffs in Sheffield." The subject of the letter was the strange cookery named in Ezekiel iv. 10-15.

We are pleased to see that the Birkenhead Branch of the N.S.S. is keeping up the agitation against the local Council for its bigotry in refusing to let the Town Hall for a Freethought lecture, while letting it for Christian and other purposes. Some excellent letters have appeared in the local press from Mr. Fletcher, Secretary of the Branch, and we hope that the controversy will be continued. We cannot compel these Christian jacks-in-office to act with decency or fairness to non-Christians, but we can give their conduct as much publicity as possible. Members of a Council who take advantage of the accident of their position to penalize those with whom they disagree are quite unfit for any public office.

A leading article on the Council's action appears in the *Birkenhead Advertiser* for April 10. The writer thinks the Council would be well-advised to treat the Secular Society as other organizations are treated, and suggests that the cause of free speech is ill-served by such action as the Council has taken. The Birkenhead Branch is asking for no favours, but for justice. We hope the Branch will continue its agitation. Public pressure may do what a native sense of honesty and decency has not yet effected.

A great deal has been written from time to time concerning the religious, or non-religious, beliefs of the Presidents of the United States of America. Mr. Franklin Steiner's *The Religious Beliefs of our Presidents*, appears to settle the question—so far as such a matter can be considered as definitely decided. There is certainly a larger number of the Presidents of the United States who were definitely Free-

thinkers that can be found among the heads of other countries. That may be because in most countries the head *must* be formally religious, while with hereditary monarchs, not merely does the religion go with the job, but the mode of succession tends to eliminate first-class brains and independence of character. Mr. Steiner's book is not one that lends itself to quotations; and all we need say is that the work has involved a considerable amount of research and is well documented. It will be found profitable and interesting to all who read it. The book was worthy of a better "get-up," but, as it is, it is very cheap at the price of one dollar. Printed as some publishers might have printed it, the work would have made a volume of some 300 pages. Orders may be sent direct to the author, 9, Globe Hotel, Milwaukee, Wis., U.S.A.

## Bruno and Christianity

(Continued from page 230)

In the drama of Bruno's life—his strange effort to reconcile himself with the Church after having gone to the furthest possible limits of revulsion from the whole Christian concept—we see Bruno as a man of the Renaissance. Indeed the most typical Renaissance man of them all, comparable only with Shakespeare.

What is the essence of Shakespearean tragedy? The new individualism (that runs riot in Marlowe) is brought up against basic "moral values." Not, of course, that there are any absolute moral values. The moral law that is the criterion, creating Renaissance tragedy, is the new sense of human unity produced by the potential in the new level to which Capitalism has raised the world.

The problem, naturally, did not present itself directly to Shakespeare; but it was with the ideological issues created by this conflict that he deals. He, like Bruno, felt acutely the tide of liberated energy on which men were being carried to new destinations; he saw it chiefly in the problems of Elizabethan politics, the union between bourgeois and court, which was broken by the rise of the Puritan party. Not that he thought only, or even mainly, in political terms, however sensitive he was to the national currents. Personal issues of suffering and achievement merged with his intuitions and perceptions of the political-social struggle to produce his picture of the Renaissance conflict.

Capitalism, by giving its powerful impetus to production, quickened the moral sense (by the new complexity of relationship evolving), but at the same time it seemed to annihilate all the methods by which unity might be established. We can see the first sketch of a reconciliation—programme in Dante. The development since his day had made both hope and fear more active in this relation. Of course, in one form or another, the problem of finding some workable balance between unity and discord, justice and injustice, appeared at every stage of history from the moment the clan broke up; it was a problem that could not cease, and has not yet ceased. For it can cease only with the creation of a classless world-society. But at decisive moments the lift of the economic level has given a new intensity and concentration to the issues. Such a moment was this, Bruno's and Shakespeare's.

Machiavelli represented the first clear spokesman of Capitalist expediency. But we fail to see what he meant if we take him for a mere cynical formulator of rules for oppression. There is a cynical intention in part, the wish to expose ruthlessly the basis on which men act in a class-riven state, to shame the liars. But Machiavelli is also voicing the hopes of early Capitalism, its energy, its necessity. Capitalism had to organize itself on national bases. The human unity is split, in a way deeper than under medievalism; but at

the same time a sort of provisional unity emerges in the nation. Machiavelli's Prince is the unifying factor of the nation, without which there is no advance. Hence his villainous expediency, his realism, is the "virtue" of Capitalism; for it is the sole basis on which productivity can be increased. Machiavelli is entirely serious in this relation, though his seriousness is invested with sharp irony because his deeper sense of justice is outraged always by the only basis on which he can erect his concept of human reality—that is, of energetically emerging Capitalism.

Thus Machiavelli became for the Renaissance the chief symbol of the age's contradictions. As the mercantile epoch waned, he also waned as a symbol; for the need of the strong central power went; Capitalism moved towards free trade and industrialism proper. Machiavelli appeared full-length in English expression in Marlowe's plays. Marlowe's first image of the new power was *Tamburlaine*, the ruthless conquistador as representative of Capitalism in the stage of primary accumulation—glorified by Marlowe because the idea of Kingship excused the violence (as in Machiavelli) as the price paid for unification, order. But Marlowe was too true a poet to remain at this simple equation; he became involved in the deepening discords of the Machiavellian concept, that is, of Capitalism itself as it was growing in the Elizabethan world. In *Faustus* and *Edward II.*, he faced up to the fact that the new release of energy came up against a barrier of frustration. It was at this point that Shakespeare took up the problem and showed in the conflict of his tragedies how "self-will" led to self-destruction, how a deepening schism was growing between individual self-assertion and integration of self. At the same time he tried to formulate the Dantesque thesis of the unifying ruler. But despite a few eloquent speeches (such as that of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*) and the one effort to depict a democratic self-dedicated King in Henry V., his central work was the exposition of the flaw in the self-assertive will, the effect of the absence of unity between individual life and social bond. In *Lear* this theme becomes consciously articulate.

But to trace all the subtle divagations of idea in Shakespeare is not our purpose here. Enough to indicate the main outline, so that we may point out the connexion between the Marlowe-Shakespeare world and the problem that Bruno was facing. Bruno, in his final struggle with the Church, was a Marlowe-Shakespeare hero in actual life; the natural corollary, the needed completion.

Bruno was torn by the conflict between his forward impulse (his joyous sense of liberated power) and his backward impulse (his effort to dredge out of the past the terms in which he might define the sense of unity proceeding from his liberation). Shakespeare tried to formulate his sense of what society lacked in his pictures of feudal kingship; Bruno tried to formulate his sense of what thought lacked in his reshuffling of scholastic terms. But Bruno was no more thinking scholastically than Shakespeare was thinking feudally.

Machiavelli, in his attempt to find a positive basis for social action—for that was what he earnestly sought, within the limitations sketched above—found himself in collision with the Church. He deprecated all ascetic and monachal procedure; it had no place in his idea of nationhood, as it had no place in the values of emerging Capitalism. He saw in the Church the enemy of all social construction, all advance. This aspect of his teachings deepened as the crisis of feudalism deepened. The bourgeois opposition, being itself based partially on parasitism, needed partially irrational formulations; hence its revolt went into sectarian religious forms. It was in the peasant application of Wicliff's teachings, in the similar doctrines of Münzer, that a real approach to social rationality

was attempted; but this attempt failed. It also had its irrational core expressive of the fact that it was seeking to revert to a stage of production lower than that being brought into being by Capitalism.

But as part of the deepening revolt, as token of the fact that Capitalism already was creating a sense of rationality, of human unity, which it could not satisfy, we find at moments a downright statement of anti-Christian integrity, an intuition of the day when an entirely scientific attitude to reality would be possible. Da Vinci and Marlowe are two important utterers of this new balance. Vasari says well of Da Vinci, "He came to so heretical a conception that he did not subject himself to any religion, considering that there was more adventure in being philosopher than Christian." Da Vinci repudiated the scholastics as mere "spiders" spinning a fictitious world out of their own internals, and the medieval doctors as mere "charlatans and fools." He placed every emphasis on the world of experience. He anticipates Bruno in his scientific attitude; his basic ideas were as follows:—

To know is to foresee. Science prepares for action. The life of man is a perpetual conquest. It is in work that the being affirms its fullness. It is by work that it discovers a value in existence and prolongs in a way its ephemeral duration. But man must dominate nature while submitting to her. So far from revolting against the laws, the wise man masters them, imagines new combinations.<sup>2</sup>

He treats Christianity with irony and contempt:—

For the rest of the definition of the Soul, I leave it to the imagination of the Friars, fathers of the people, who, by inspiration, know all the secrets.

The unhappy women of their own inclination will go to confess to men all their lusts, their most secret acts of shame.

A lie is so vile that even if it spoke of the things of God it would take away its grace from the divine.

In all the parts of Europe, there will be found numerous people groaning with grief for the death of a single man dead in the East.

And Marlowe makes his Machiavelli cry out:—

I hold there is no sin but ignorance—

and personally developed an insurgent blasphemy.

JACK LINDSAY.

(To be concluded)

## In Sleepy Hollow

CHAIRMAN: We are about to listen to a short address by Mr. Puller, entitled *Search the Scriptures*. Mr. Puller is not personally known to me, but he has been spoken of very highly by a very dear friend of mine who, at one time (true, quite a long time ago now) was a prominent member of our St. Michael's Mutual Improvement Society. Mr. Puller comes from London. [Applause.] I feel confident that it will repay us all to give him our closest attention.

Mr. Puller: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen. When I was a young man I was persuaded to become a member of the Scripture Union. That was a very important moment of my life. [Applause.] I was full of enthusiasm and an omnivorous reader. The only fault I could find with the daily portions of Scripture laid down to be read in the roster of that organization was that they were of insufficient length. For instance, I discovered, in my journey through Joshua, that I was instructed to read Chapter X up to the 15th

<sup>2</sup> Charbonnel, *op. cit.* Bruno, of course, was not influenced in any way by da Vinci's thought, which remained unknown to the world, hidden in manuscript.

verse, and then skip a few chapters and resume my reading the next day at the XIVth chapter. My habit was to sit down and read, with the gravest attention, the parts omitted. I was amply recompensed. I do not question for a moment that these omissions were arranged by the Scripture Union with the maximum of forethought and good intention. But being a well-trained young man I knew that I had received the injunction to *Search the Scriptures* from the Highest of Authorities. I knew, as well, from 2 Tim. iii. 16: All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. This knowledge fortified me. I came to the conclusion that one couldn't have too much of a good thing [Hear, Hear] and I have never had any reason to regret my temerity.

Friends; the result was that, at a very early age, I browsed in pastures which, if relatively neglected by many religious souls, proved to be equally verdant and succulent. Those who from time to time enjoy themselves by walking (hiking, I believe, is now the correct expression), through this green and pleasant isle, will readily understand me when I say that the Byways in God's Word proved as entertaining as the Broad Highways. Little-known aphorisms of beauty and wisdom were thrown at me with bewildering rapidity. Few people, nowadays, appear to read the Minor Prophets. As, however, their writings form part of God's Holy Word, the Minor Prophets must have been given their opportunity for unimpeachable reasons. I have spent much time over the Minor Prophets. [Mine's a Minor! and some laughter.] Joel, Daniel, Nahum, Haggai, and Zephaniah have all helped me to a fullness of vision, and so prepared my digestion for the remarkable *tour-de-force* of St. John the Divine. As for Malachi (incidentally the last book of the Old Testament) it is difficult to exaggerate the satisfaction registered on reading through that. And much, also, could be said about the second chapter of Obadiah, that gem of purest ray serene. [Applause.]

It is at times stated that there is much obscurity in Holy Writ. This can be admitted with cheerfulness. It is for those who have ears to hear that the Bible is full of meaning. [Hear, hear.] One must on occasion wrestle with the Lord if the real meaning, or indeed any meaning, is to emerge. Surely, however, it is a truism to say that obscurity has always been recognized as one of the prerogatives of greatness. If Meredith and Browning were at times obscure and yet remained admittedly great writers, how much more difficult to understand, by parity of reasoning, will the Great Author be. The Greatest of all Authors, the Father of all the Chapels, whose voice rolled over Sinai, and who himself was composer and compositor of the first pamphlet that famous effort entitled *Don't!*

If I am able to read the Signs of the Times aright, obscurity is the very Hall Mark of Genius. [Hear!] It is clear that as the centuries go by and Man gets nearer and nearer to God, man partakes more and more of the divine attributes. Besides, what is to-day obscure may become to-morrow, crystal-clear. If to-day we see as through a glass, darkly [Applause], the lineaments of the dark and dread Jehovah, tomorrow the Son may be shining. [Sustained applause]. Difficulties, not only of this kind, but of all kinds, will vanish, as knowledge grows from more to more, particularly, and the proviso is important, if more of reverence in us dwell. [Enthusiasm].

Bear with me a while whilst I give you a personal example. I had long been, to use a homely phrase, beaten to the wide by the verses in Ezekiel (i. 15-21). One day whilst cycling on a club run in the Lake District, I was one of the unfortunate victims of a general collision, and was taken to hospital suffering from

slight concussion. When I was arriving at semi-consciousness these words of Ezekiel returned to me again and again—and with a significance never attached to them before. The Lord's methods for increasing spiritual insight are at times mysterious, but it is not for us to question these methods. God moves in a mysterious way. [Applause.] I could, but will not, dilate upon the well known case of St. Paul.

In my days of systematic reading of the Bible—systematic in the sense that I refused to miss anything—it was difficult for me, in the immaturity of my mind, to find correction and reproof, or even doctrine, in much that I perused. Much toil and tribulation were my portion when I first read the first dozen chapters of Chronicles and looked with eagerness for the expected instruction in righteousness. Enlightenment was to come with years. In retrospect I discovered that a valuable discipline had been accorded me. Patience had been acquired and a tendency to irritability overcome. In fact, I make bold to say that the reproduction of these pages at the present day, as a special *brochure*, would be something quite novel in the history of reproduction, begetting, without a per-adventure [Applause], much spiritual fruit.

Friends, when, in all my varying humours, I have turned to the Books of Books, I have never failed to find something consoling and helpful. I have found a psalm for every sentiment; a verse for every vicissitude. [Applause.] I have encountered blessed words like Mesopotamia, Raca, Aholah and Aholibah, Huz and Buz. When I have felt at times a Sinner of Magnitude and prone to melancholy, I have read, again and again, the story of David, the Man after God's Own Heart, and my spirits have revived. When in business difficulties, I have studied the life of the Patriarch, Jacob, and invariably with spiritual, and other kinds of, gain. The story of Jacob has indeed been a lamp to my feet and a beacon unto mine eyes. [Applause.] And all my life I have admired the Sermon on the Mount [Bravo!], fully conscious of its loftiness and idealism, so much beyond poor, erring man. In domestic life, as well as in the thousand and one emergencies when help is needed, I have turned to the Bible, and invariably found the support I craved to strengthen my wishes and emotions. At every turn I have found nutriment; in Judges, Joshua, Titus, and, yes, Ezekiel. To me the Bible has been a burning and a shining light; a Voice crying in the Wilderness; a Book overflowing with Milk and Honey, an ever-present Help in Time of Trouble, and I thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your kind attention. [Applause.]

Chairman: I feel sure there can be no discussion on this very eloquent and valuable address. Mr. Puller has in this matter, I feel confident, spoken with a voice imbued with the spirit of Real Christianity.

Mr. Robinson: I move a cordial vote of thanks to Mr. L. Puller for his helpful address. I hope his advice to read God's Word, in all its precious entirety, will be taken to heart by all.

Mr. Smith: I second that, Mr. Chairman. Carried with acclamation.

Chairman: Mr. Puller, I am sure, feels gratified by your reception of his remarks. Next week the Rev. Mr. Golightly will, having returned from his annual holiday, give us an address on "Fishing in the Lake of Galilee."

T. H. ELSTOB.

I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world.

Bertrand Russell.

## The National Secular Society

### ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MAY 16, 1937

#### AGENDA

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report.
3. Financial Report.
4. Election of President.  
Motion by South London, West London, Manchester, Liverpool, West Ham, Chester-le-Street, Burnley, and North London branches:—  
"That Mr. Chapman Cohen be re-elected President of the N.S.S."
5. Election of Secretary.  
Motion by the Executive:—  
"That Mr. R. H. Rosetti be appointed Secretary."
6. Election of Treasurer.  
Motion by West London Branch:—  
"That Mr. H. R. Clifton be elected Treasurer."
7. Election of Auditor.  
Mr. H. L. Theobald is eligible and offers himself for election.
8. Nominations for Executive.  
SCOTLAND.—Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, nominated by Glasgow Branch.  
WALES.—Mr. T. Gorniot and Mr. A. C. Rosetti, nominated by Swansea Branch.  
N.E. GROUP.—Miss K. B. Kough, nominated by Newcastle and Chester-le-Street Branches.  
Mr. A. B. Moss, nominated by South Shields Branch.  
N.W. GROUP.—Mr. E. Bryant and Mrs. E. Venton, nominated by Liverpool, Blackburn, Bolton, Chester and Burnley Branches.  
S.W. GROUP.—Mr. W. J. W. Easterbrook, nominated by Plymouth Branch.  
MIDLAND GROUP.—Mrs. C. G. Quinton (Jnr.) nominated by Birmingham Branch.  
SOUTHERN GROUP.—Mr. T. H. Elstob, nominated by Hants and Dorset Branch.  
SOUTH LONDON.—Mr. H. Preece and Mr. J. Seibert, nominated by South London Branch.  
NORTH LONDON.—Mr. L. Ebury, nominated by North London Branch.  
EAST LONDON.—Mr. H. Silvester, nominated by Bethnal Green and West Ham Branches.  
WEST LONDON.—Mr. G. Bedborough and Mr. C. Tuson, nominated by West London Branch.
9. Executive's report *re* question of Vice-Presidents, remitted from last Conference.
10. Motion by the Executive:—  
(a) "That in such cases where the electoral area does not nominate its full representation the Executive may fill any such vacancies, and that this rule be put into operation forthwith:—  
(b) "That the word 'two' be deleted from Rule 7 (clause 2), and 'three' be substituted."
11. Motion (a) by Glasgow Branch:—  
"That a system of rotation be devised by which the Annual Conference be held in the chief centres in the country, commencing with Glasgow for 1938.  
Motion (b) by Plymouth Branch:—  
"That the Annual Conference be always held in London."
12. Motion by South London Branch:—  
"That the reaffirmation of the non-political attitude of the N.S.S. will avoid the disintegrating influence of politics on the Society's work."
13. Motion by Mr. G. Bedborough:—  
"That this Conference deplores the renewed competition in armaments among the nations of Europe, with its logical and almost necessary ending in war; it regards the present state of Europe as a crowning demonstration of the failure of the Christian

Churches as a humanizing factor in life, and asserts its conviction that the ideal of Thomas Paine—the creation of a United States of Europe—with its armed forces functioning as an international police force, holds the only promise of universal peace."

14. Motion by Bethnal Green and Hackney Branch:—  
"That this Conference expresses its strong disapproval of the relations now existing between the N.S.S. and the League of Nations Union."
15. Motion by Mr. T. H. Elstob:—  
"That this Conference deplores the steady deterioration of the Newspaper Press of this country as shown by its tendency to combine for definite political, religious or other ends, and seeking to bring these about by the constant reiteration of one point of view, and the deliberate suppression of information and opinions opposed thereto, thereby constituting a more subtle and more dangerous form of attack upon the freedom of opinion than were the older methods of open hostility and persecution."
16. Motion by Mr. H. S. Wishart:—  
"That only the 'Principles and Objects' be printed on Membership Cards; the Immediate Practical Objects being separately printed."
17. Motion by Mr. J. T. Brighton:—  
"That the continued refusal of the British Broadcasting Corporation to provide sufficient varied alternatives to the sermons and religious talks on their Sunday programmes, thereby impelling many listeners to connect with Continental Stations, is a policy in direct opposition to democratic rights, derogatory to national prestige, and an offensive reflexion upon by far the greater number of licence-holders."
18. Motion by the Executive:—  
"That this Conference is in favour of an invitation to the International Union of Freethinkers to hold its Congress for 1938 in London."
19. Motion by West Ham Branch:—  
"That bearing in mind the degree to which Churches and Chapels are seeking to compensate themselves for the decline of religious belief by permeating social movements, this Conference urges all Freethinkers connected with social and political parties to do all that lies in their power to prevent the operation of an influence that cannot but make for retrogression."
20. Motion by Mr. J. Clayton:—  
"That this Conference protests strongly against the arrangements between Education Committees and Committees of clergymen, whereby a stronger religious influence is brought to bear upon both school-children and teachers, and calls upon those who do not agree with the State teaching of religion to show their disapproval by withdrawing their children from religious instruction in all State-supported schools."

The Conference will sit in the Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool, Morning Session, 10.30 to 12.30; Afternoon Session, 2.30 to 4.30. Delegates will be required to produce their credentials at the door; Members, the current card of membership. Only Members of the Society are entitled to be present. A Luncheon for delegates and visitors at 1 p.m., price 3s., will be provided in the Stork Hotel. There will be a reception of Members and Delegates at 7 o'clock, on Saturday evening, May 15, in the Stork Hotel, and a Public Demonstration on Sunday evening at 7, in the Picton Hall, Liverpool.

By order of the Executive,

CHAPMAN COHEN, *President.*

R. H. ROSETTI, *Secretary.*

Superstition is the child of slavery. Freethought will give us truth. When all have the right to think and to express their thoughts, every brain will give to all the best it has. The world will then be filled with intellectual wealth.—*Ingersoll.*

## Blessing the Fishing Fleet

ON the last Sunday in December an Anglican Bishop blessed 60 fishing boats and a lifeboat at Queenscliff, Victoria. The form of blessing was as follows:—

To the great glory of God and in the faith of Jesus Christ we bless these vessels and all that sail in them, that the Lord shall preserve their going out and their coming in, from this time forth and for evermore.

After the blessing the fishing fleet hoisted sails and put to sea. The ceremony was successful in attracting the crowd. Special trains were run and thousands of people, including the State Governor, were present.

Of course, many years ago, this "blessing" business was one of the main activities of the clergy. All sorts of things were blessed, and although no material advantage came from the ritual, it is without question that the clergy in those pre-scientific days sincerely thought there might be, and therefore were ignorantly satisfied that they were rendering public service.

But it is difficult to imagine that the clergy of today really believe that the blessing contributes to the safety of the boat at sea or to the catch of fish.

Perhaps the idea behind the revival of this practice is to introduce a spectacular novelty which will attract people who have outgrown interest in ordinary church services.

If so—all well and good! If the Church is anxious to continue its existence, and if it cannot play a sensible and practical part in the world, there is nothing like spectacular novelties to attract the public—that is, if the aim is to maintain a following at any cost. A comedian is more popular than a philosopher, and rich robes appeal more to the crowd than the painstaking toil of the scientist who works for human good.

Perhaps the Church will extend the range of its ancient practice of "blessing." After all, there are other things besides fishing boats. Why not bless the cabbage crop and our cricketers in the Test team? Politicians might be blessed—policemen also!

The clergy might recall that in the ancient days the Church not only blessed, but it also cursed. If the Church revived the cursing business it would probably draw even greater crowds. In our opinion, the cursing in which the Church once engaged is decidedly the more amusing.

Let us glance back to the seventeenth century. In order to do so we turn to the learned pages of Sir James G. Frazer's *Folklore in the Old Testament* (Vol. 3).

After the revocation of the edict of Nantes, in 1685, the Protestant chapel at La Rochelle was condemned to be demolished, but the bell, perhaps out of regard for its value, was spared. However, to expiate the crime of having rung heretics to prayers, it was sentenced to be first whipped, and then buried and disinterred, by way of symbolizing its new birth at passing into Catholic hands. Thereafter it was catechised, and obliged to recant and promise that it would never again relapse into sin. Having made this ample and honourable amende, the bell was reconciled, baptized, and given, or rather sold, to the parish of St. Bartholomew. When the governor sent in the bill for the bell to the parish authorities they declined to settle it, alleging that the bell, as a recent convert to Catholicism, desired to take advantage of a law lately passed by the king, which allowed all new converts a delay of three years in paying their debts.

Again, to quote Frazer:—

When the inhabitants of a district suffered from the incursions or the excessive exuberance of noxious

animals or insects, they laid a complaint against the said animals or insects in the proper ecclesiastical court, the court appointed experts to survey and report upon the damage that had been wrought. An advocate was next appointed to defend the animals and show cause why they should not be summoned. They were then cited three several times, and not appearing to answer for themselves, judgment was given against them by default. The court after that served a notice on the animals, warning them to leave the district within a specified time under pain of adjuration; and if they did not take their departure on or before the date appointed the exorcism was solemnly pronounced.

Here is an ecclesiastical sentence pronounced by the Bishop of Lausanne against insects known as "Inger," in the year 1478:—

We, Benedict of Montferrand, Bishop of Lausanne, etc., having heard the entreaty of the high and mighty lords of Berne against the *inger* and the ineffectual and rejectable answer of the latter, and having thereupon fortified ourselves with the Holy Cross, and having before our eyes the fear of God, from whom alone all just judgments proceed, and being advised in this cause by a council of men learned in the law, do therefore acknowledge and avow in this our writing that the appeal against the detestable vermin and *inger*, which are harmful to herbs, vines, meadows, grain and other fruits, is valid, and that they be exorcised in the person of Jean Perrodet, their defender. In Conformity therewith we charge and burden them with our curse, and command them to be obedient, and anathematize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that they turn away from all fields, grounds, enclosure, seeds, fruits, and produce, and depart. By virtue of the same sentence I declare and affirm that you are banned and exorcised, and through the power of Almighty God shall be called accursed and shall daily decrease whithersoever you may go, to the end that of you nothing shall remain save for the use and profit of man.

The verdict had been awaited by the people with great anxiety, and the sentence was received with corresponding jubilation.

We contend that this form of cursing is every bit as useful as the blessing of boats performed recently by the Australian Bishop.

How interesting it would be to see one of our modern Rev. Lordships cursing the grasshoppers which from time to time menace the crops of Australian farmers.

The pages of Frazer's book also remind us of other ecclesiastical deeds in those bygone religious years.

Incredible though it seems to us now, it is nevertheless true that in 1474 an aged cock was tried and found guilty of laying an egg. The proceedings were on a definitely religious basis. The pleadings in this case, says Frazer, were voluminous. Finally, it was decided that Satan was responsible and the cock was sentenced to death, not in the character of a cock, but in that of a sorcerer or devil who had assumed the form of the fowl. He and the egg which he was alleged to have laid, were burned, together "with the solemnity of a regular execution."

Now if a bishop could revive this sort of thing what a crowd would be present to watch the trial! It would outdo our record cricket crowd.

But blessing fishing boats is a step in the right direction of the Middle Ages. Revive more of these old activities of the Church and if they are taken seriously it will not be long before society relapses into that state of ignorance in which it is possible to believe that a rooster can lay an egg.

Reprinted from the Melbourne "Rationalist."

## 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

#### INDOOR.

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES (17 Grange Road): 8.0, Thursday, April 22. A Debate with a member of the Company of Jehovah's Witnesses and a Freethinker.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1): 11.30, John Katz, B.A.—"Religion and the Intellectuals."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Earlham Hall Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, London, E.17): 7.0, Saturday, April 17. Social. Admission free.

#### OUTDOOR

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Kingston Market): 7.0, Mr. Evans, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Highbury Corner): 8.0, Saturday, Mr. L. Ebury. Hampstead, White Stone Pond, 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. South Hill Park, Hampstead, 8.0, Monday, Mr. L. Ebury. Mornington Crescent, Camden Town, 8.0, Wednesday, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes and Evans. 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes and Tuson. Thursday, 7.30, Messrs. Saphin, Bryant, Tuson and others. The *Freethinker*, Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, and Chapman Cohen's latest pamphlets may be had outside Park Gates, close to Marble Arch Tube Station.

### COUNTRY

#### INDOOR

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Cobden Hall, 14 Cort Street, Blackburn): 7.30, Impromptu Discussion on—"Freethought: its Meaning and Value." Literature for sale.

PRESTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hesketh Buildings): 7.15 Mr. McLellan (Bury)—A Lecture.

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

TEES SIDE BRANCH (Jubilee Hall, Leeds Street, Stockton): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton—A Lecture.

#### OUTDOOR

BLACHO: 7.30, Monday, April 19, Mr. J. Clayton.

COLNE (Vivary Bridge): 7.30, Sunday, April 18, Mr. J. Clayton.

LUMB-IN-ROSSENDALE: 7.30, Friday, April 16, Mr. J. Clayton.

### CAUSALITY

It has been suggested that the new outlook (on Causality) will remove the well known philosophical conflict between the doctrines of free will and determinism, and it has been welcomed by many for that reason. I would personally offer a most strenuous opposition to any such idea. The question is a philosophic one outside the region of thought or physics, and I cannot see that physical theory provides any new loophole. If we are to find room for free will within the realm governed by physical science, we have to suppose that the motions of our own bodies are in some way free not to obey the inexorable commands of the older mechanics. At first sight it might appear that the Uncertainty Principle provides the necessary latitude, but that is contradicted by closer consideration. We cannot say exactly what will happen to a single electron, but we can confidently estimate the probabilities. If an experiment is carried out with a thousand electrons, what was a probability for one becomes nearly a certainty. Physical theory confidently predicts that the millions of millions of electrons in our bodies will behave even more regularly, and that to find a case of noticeable departure from the average we should have to wait for a time quite fantastically longer than the estimated age of the universe. How then does the Uncertainty Principle help to free us from the bonds of determinism?—"The New Conceptions of Matter," by C. G. Darwin, M.A., F.R.S.

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