

# THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •  
— Founded 1881 —

Vol. LVII.—No. 30

SUNDAY, JULY 25, 1937

PRICE THREEPENCE

## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>The Function of Atheism—The Editor</i> . . . . .	465
<i>Theology without Tears—Mimmermus</i> . . . . .	467
<i>The Tardy Development of Toleration—T. F. Palmer</i> . . . . .	468
<i>The Untouchables—T. H. Elstob</i> . . . . .	469
<i>The Gentle Art of Prophecy—H. Cutner</i> . . . . .	470
<i>Human Kinship—Ignotus</i> . . . . .	474
<i>The Poison of Fiction—C. S. Fraser</i> . . . . .	475
<i>To Read the Bible is to Disbelieve It—Frank Hill</i> . . . . .	476
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

## Views and Opinions

### The Function of Atheism

THE Dean of Durham, Dr. Alington, has offended a number of clergymen, and no one knows how many laymen. He said that Calvinism bred Atheism. I do not think that the Dean realized that he was in saying this laying down an important truth, and one which applies to the whole of religion. Had he done so he would probably have not said it at all. He realized that Calvinism, which is one of the most logical forms of historic Christianity, was morally objectionable to a modern civilized mind, and used the term Atheism as standing, not merely for religious error, but for something that was morally objectionable. And in that he was slanderous, absurd and historically wrong. For, as a general term, Atheism has meant one who is without "God," and, specifically, the denial of the existence of particular gods as defined in various religions. And as every believer in a particular god is, *ipso facto*, a denier of the existence of every other defined god, it follows that the offence of the modern Atheist is that he treats the one god reserved in the way that religionists have treated all the others. The believer denies the existence of ninety-nine out of every other hundred gods. The Atheist adds one more to the list and gets into a devil of a row for doing so. He is not even allowed to offer the apology of the servant-girl on the unexpected appearance of her baby—it was only a little one.

\* \* \*

### Calvinism and Atheism

Dr. Alington believes that Calvinism leads to Atheism, and that is, from his point of view, the worst that anyone can say about it. But, after all, Calvinism is part of historic Christianity, and Calvin was no mean theologian. He was in fact a very great theologian, and anyone who has ever run through his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (I read it, cursorily, many years ago in a great calf bound old folio, and so managed to get something of the atmosphere in which such a book ought to be read) must recognize this, and also

that he was a man of great moral force. And one who knows the main features of Christian theology will also recognize that there is very little in Calvinism that is strikingly original. Predestination and selection, the doctrine of grace, the belief in an eternal hell, all the most revolting features of historic Calvinism are to be found with St. Paul, with Augustine, with Luther, and other great Christian figures. Calvin had in these islands a fellow-spirit in John Knox, who was not his equal, yet the two deserved Ingersoll's description as fitting each other as the upper and lower jaws of a hyena. There is a moral to be drawn from Calvin's system of religion, but I do not think that the Dean of Durham will draw it. And the moral is that in Calvin we may watch the demoralizing and debasing influence of the Christian religion on a man of naturally strong intellect and of great force of character.

The fault of Calvin in the eyes of the modern parson, as is the case with men like Jonathan Edwards and Luther, is that they took the Christian religion and set forth its teachings and its implications logically and faithfully. They did not, as do men of the type of Dr. Alington, first acquaint themselves with what would be acceptable to the modern mind, and then retranslate the Christian religion to suit it. Calvin said the Christian revelation is here, it was given by God, we are not concerned with the justice of it, but with the exposition of it. Calvin lived at a time when men did not apologize for Christianity, they stated it, and woe to those who rejected it. The Church in the sixteenth century did not go to non-believing scientists to secure a testimonial to the moral value of its creed; it told men of science what they *must* believe, and what they would be permitted to teach; and Servetus and Bruno at the stake, Galileo in his prison, and Vesalius on his penal pilgrimage emphasized the urgency of the order. Calvin took the Christian religion with its blood-sacrifice, its planned world, its teaching of human depravity, etc., and set forth the logical and irresistible conclusions. I agree with those who say that his creed saddened the lives of millions, and made some of the finest feelings of human nature an opportunity for damnation. Calvinism in Geneva, Puritanism in England, and Presbyterianism in Scotland, each offered examples of the gloom cast over life by Christianity, of the narrowness and intolerance cultivated; they represented so many attempts to govern a country by the Bible. The world is not likely to repeat the experiment. Not even the massed lying and suppressed criticism of the Oxford Groupists will inspire a repetition.

\* \* \*

### Atheism the End

I can agree with Dr. Alington that Calvinism leads a man to Atheism, that is, if the man has enough independence of disposition, and understanding to appreciate rightly what is before him. But while I

agree with him, I do not think he will agree with me, because I can see that Calvinism leads to Atheism only so far as Calvinism is considered as part of Christianity, and only so far as Christianity is considered as part of religion in general. For if I read history and science aright, then all religion ends in Atheism as childhood ends in maturity, as tyranny excites the desire for liberty, and injustice leads to a struggle for justice. Given knowledge and understanding religion must give way to Atheism, for Atheism is the only way out of a position that becomes steadily more and more indefensible. Gods are plausible existences so long as man does not possess a true understanding of the world in which he finds himself. They are not the expressions of knowledge and understanding (I must bracket the two because knowledge minus understanding is never a reliable guide) they stand for man's ignorance and fear. The strongest argument that any theist has ever found against a scientific interpretation of the world is "science does not know," and it is a sound impulse that leads the religiously-minded to welcome the ignorance and impotence of science as good news.

But every advance in knowledge and understanding leads to a change in the idea of God. And, note, the change is not in terms of a greater knowledge of God, but in terms of less knowledge. The older theologians had not very much doubt as to what God was like, what he did, and why he did it. Primitive man was still more certain about the gods. But in each case as knowledge grew the certainty about God became less; and to-day "God" is reduced to a mere force, or to a mathematical symbol, or to an aspiration. God is no longer a person, he is a shadow of a shade, a hang-over from the fears of primitive man, and the wild speculations of medieval religious necromancers. We know nothing of God with certainty, and it is from many theologians that this assurance comes. Herbert Spencer pointed out that in cosmic evolution the change is from the indefinite to the definite; but in religion the change is from the definite to the indefinite. Religion gets smaller as it "develops." Its growth is downward. It begins as something tangible proceeds as something intangible; and finally ends in Atheism. The "advanced" theologian no longer preaches morality in terms of religion, he preaches religion in terms of morality. Religion to-day has nothing to tell us about science or philosophy, nothing about morals or sociology. It has no message of its own, it has only a crowd of men who stand before the world trying to fool the public with old formulas, and pretending that these formulas still stand for a living truth.

\* \* \*

#### Atheism Inevitable

Religion breeds Atheism because the greater man's understanding the more glaring becomes the opposition between the religious theory and the observable facts. Science manages to get along without any necessary reference to a god. Social problems are stated and dealt with just as though no God exists. Ethics has definitely separated itself from theology, and even religious phrases such as "God help us," or "For God's sake," have no reference to the living thought of to-day. Theologians may still chatter about the providence of God, but the reply to that was given by Lucian some eighteen centuries ago. In the days of the decaying Greek mythology he represents the gods as gathered together to discuss the decline of belief in their existence, and one of the minor deities is made to say:—

What other conclusion could they (mankind) arrive at when they saw the confusion around them? Good men neglected, perishing in penury and slavery; pro-

fligate wretches, wealthy, honoured and powerful. Sacrilegious temple robbers undiscovered and unpunished, devotees and saints beaten and crucified. With such phenomena before them, of course, men doubted our existence. . . . We affect surprise that men who are not fools decline to place their faith in us. We ought rather to be pleased that there is a man left to say his prayers. We are among ourselves with no strangers present. Tell us, then, Zeus, have you ever really taken pains to distinguish between good men and bad? Let us be candid. All we have really cared for has been a steady altar service. Everything else has been left to chance. And now men are opening their eyes. They perceive that whether they pray or don't pray, go to church or don't go to church makes no difference to them. And we are receiving our deserts.

That indictment is as true to-day as it was eighteen hundred years ago, and it is not surprising that the Christian Church did what it could to suppress the Pagan writings. Religion was being found out, but the consequence of that discovery was arrested for a time, and then the process of decay recommenced. But to every step taken by man to discard an impossible religious theory the Church raised the cry of Atheism. That was intended as an indictment, but it masked a compliment; for Atheism asserted the right of every man to think, to question, to deny, to strike out new paths, and to exchange old superstitions for verifiable truth. If Atheism had not been constantly affirmed, even what is called progress in religion would not have occurred, and we should all be still worshipping the deities of our primitive ancestors. From Buddha to Bradlaugh Atheism has meant the call to a larger life, the exchange of dead beliefs for living ideas.

That is why I find myself in agreement with the Dean of Durham that Calvinism breeds Atheism. It did not, but it now does. It did not when it was pounded, because it was no more than an extremely logical presentation of the Christian religion in an environment favourable to superstition. It does to-day breed Atheism because our knowledge is greater, our understanding is clearer, and the power of the Churches is less than it was. But this truth is only a partial one, it belongs to the larger truth that all religion carries within it the conditions of its own dissolution.

When Trelawney asked Shelley why he called himself an Atheist, the reply came, I did not choose it. It was thrown down as a gauntlet, and I could not pick it up. That was the reply of a brave and clear mind. But Shelleys are scarce, and there are still many who move in fear, not of religion, but of the power wielded by the religious, who still believe that it is part of the duty they owe their god to prevent the mental independence of their fellows. But that fear is also growing weaker. It took thousands of generations for the animal from which man came to cease to walk on four legs and to stand erect. It is only yesterday that men dared to question the religious theory of life. Multitudes still crawl in fear before it. A reasoned Atheism alone can give them the courage to stand upright.

Three weeks ago I pointed out how difficult it was for a man to avoid sometimes expressing a truth. He may not mean to do it, he may not recognize it when he states it, and he may resent its recognition by others. But the fact remains. And the Dean of Durham is an example. He states a truth that he considers fatal to a form of Christianity with which he disagrees. But he does not realize that it is a truth that applies to every form of genuine religious belief. Calvinism leads to Atheism. So does every form of religion. That truth may be ignored, but it cannot be destroyed.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Theology without Tears

"Many people think that they have religion when they have only got dyspepsia."—Ingersoll.

It has ever been a source of wonder to Freethinkers how Christians have still been able to maintain, after a perusal of their Scriptures, that their own particular deity was entitled to the credit of benevolence. The pious opinion really seemed in the nature of a most unmerited compliment, unsupported by any evidence. The grim exponents of the religion of the "Man of Sorrows" seldom smiled themselves, the study of "God's Word" having, apparently, a depressing effect upon them. So much was this the case that one could tell Christians by their facial expression. Nay, more, the tell-tale features advertised how far the victim was actually suffering from the disease of religiosity. From the slight droop of the mouth which distinguishes the Catholic and the High Churchman to the resemblance to a tired funeral-horse worn by the flat-chested warriors of the Church and Salvation Armies, one might classify them with some degree of accuracy.

Christians were cankered through with austerity. Generation after generation had been stifled under a religious system which was sunless, joyless, and graceless. The results were to be seen in the dull, dismal, dreary, rectangular frequenters of the churches, chapels, tin-tabernacles, and mission-tents. The professional pulpit-punchers and bible-bangers were so far incapable of honest laughter that any undertaker was a Merry Andrew compared with them. In short, the Christian world was in the meshes of darkness and despair. This precious Gospel that life for the vast majority of the human race was but the ante-chamber to an eternal torture-chamber, which was in reality an arraignment, not merely of the Christian deity, but of human nature itself, finally transformed this fair world of ours, for all sincere Christians, into a darker and more terrible hell than even the genius of Dante and Milton conceived.

All this unmerited suffering might have been avoided if the earliest theologians had possessed the saving grace of humour, and been able to see a joke without a surgical operation beforehand. It is entirely owing to the mental shortcomings and density of these Oriental scribes that the Christian religion is a nightmare instead of a pleasant dream. These Oriental fanatics misconceived and misinterpreted their own Bible from title to colophon. Innocently and artlessly they took legend and myth impartially and read them literally as if the transcript was yesterday's newspaper. We all know the fearful results, beside which a drunkard's dream appears as being a normal happening.

The Christian Bible may be regarded as a work of considerable humour. We must, however, "speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us." The Holy Ghost's humour is not as our humour, nor his jests as our jests. Transcribed by scribes thousands of years ago, it possesses an artless humour suited to a remote period of history. It is idle to expect the satire of Heine, the irony of Gibbon, or the sophisticated humour of Anatole France. Quip, repartee, and epigram are strangers to the Biblical pages. Maybe, a ghostly humour is best suited to a ghostly author. Although we cannot say that there is a laugh on every page, a smile in every chapter, the elementary fun of this Bible is sufficient. There are sly stories, Rabelaisian anecdotes, and quaint burlesques, sufficient to have enlightened the theologians, had they but possessed the capacity of being amused.

As a humorist, the Holy Ghost somewhat resembles Artemus Ward; although he is the famous

American's superior as a writer of fiction. The ghost is a showman, absolutely calm about his exhibits, as a showman should be. He says the most deliciously funny things without turning a hair. That astonishing story of the prophet Jonah and the lodging-house whale is the perfection of unemotional joking. Whilst reading, we fairly sympathize with the unfortunate whale who had a bed-sitting-room in his interior, and sigh that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals did not then exist. The humour, too, of the tale of the grand old gardener, Adam, is infectious. He is stated to have been the first man. If he had been a shoemaker, instead of a gardener, he would also have been the last man. Adam starts life at full age, and without the assistance of any parents and popular prejudice is in favour of two. He is able to throw hundredweights about on his first day on earth, and he lives nearly a thousand years. Think it out! Cocking his eye at "the only girl in the world" in his early manhood, and nearly a thousand years later falling over his white whiskers and telling the tale of the first appearance of Eve, the earliest operation without chloroform. To visualize such an astonishing career is to find oneself dissolved in inextinguishable laughter.

Another masterpiece of exaggeration is the yarn of the ancient mariner, Noah, including, as it does, the suggestion that millions of creatures from elephants to lice were crammed into a seaworthy pan-technicon. The humorous climax is reached in the further suggestion that only two fleas accompanied eight Orientals on the fateful excursion. The stories of the talking snake in the Garden of Eden, Daniel in the lion's den, the ten plagues of Egypt, the tower of Babel, and Ezekiel's memorable banquet, are all examples of sly Oriental humour. The life of the "Man of Sorrows" in the later pages is not without its smiling interest. When the hero walks the waves, argues with a fig-tree, turns water into wine, feeds thousands with some buns and a few sardines, and finally sails away in the ether like a balloon, we feel that we are in the atmosphere of the *Arabian Nights* and *Alice in Wonderland*, and not in the beaten track of history.

We admit, cheerfully, that there is a falling off in the latter pages. There is, however, a sprinkling of fun, like raisins in a workhouse pudding, but what of that? A pearl is none the less a pearl even if it is surrounded by an intolerable deal of oyster. Literary men have discovered some bright passages. Mark Twain has pointed out that the phrase, "the street which is called straight" is ironic, for, he adds, the thoroughfare in question is "straighter than a corkscrew, but not so straight as a rainbow." Byron, a great admirer of female beauty, found a reference to a lady's nose as resembling "the tower which looketh towards Damascus." Doubting Thomas Huxley extracted much fun from the story of the bedevilled porkers, but never met a rasher opponent than Gladstone, who was as innocent of humour as the cocksure critics who find Bacon in Shakespeare. Bob Ingersoll, too, made hundreds of thousands laugh with his *Mistakes of Moses*, founded entirely upon the so-called sacred volume.

Fed on such food, Christians should have waxed fat and become jolly. To class this particular Scripture as sober history, or earnest fiction, is what the Prayer Book calls "a work of supererogation." It is, in the last analysis, simply a wonder-book of riotous, exuberant, Eastern imagination. If people would only read the volume attentively, instead of merely chattering about it, such innocent misconception would never arise. The Ghost is a more subtle humorist than people give him credit for, and rightly read, his book would add to the gaiety of nations. The refusal of the stupid, stolid, good, pious folks to see his jokes

must have astonished and perplexed the Ghost. He never expressed his own amusement, but "let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed on his damask cheek." It was well! If he had let himself go, he must have held his two sides, which are six, until his three heads, which are one, fairly ached from the explosion.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Tardy Development of Toleration

THE Laudian persecution of the Puritans and other Dissenters in the tumultuous reign of Charles I. served to strengthen Nonconformity. Under the later Stuarts the Anglican Church remained supreme but, despite oppression, Dissenters increased in numbers, organization and political influence. Also, the temporary Puritan and State Church alliance which occasioned the downfall and flight of James II. necessitated a fuller recognition of the former as legitimate members of the community. Hence, the prompt passing of the Toleration Act (1 William and Mary c. 18).

From a present-day standpoint this was a very mean measure. Not a single Act which exacted conformity with the Established Church was repealed. All the disgraceful disabilities imposed by the Corporation Act of 1661, and the Test Act of 1673 remained in force. Indeed, the only real concessions were the granting of the right of public worship in Nonconformist conventicles, a right previously restricted to the State Church; the remission of penalties for non-attendance at Church services; the recognition of all subjects who took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and were willing to sign a declaration denying Transubstantiation.

Dissenting ministers were also released from certain restrictions of earlier Acts if, in addition to subscribing the oaths, they assented to the thirty-nine Articles in a slightly amended form. Also, under this Act, Quakers were allowed to affirm instead of swearing an oath, while all meeting-houses were registered, and this registration provided the congregations with legal protection from molestation.

The unrepealed Test and Corporation Acts were exceedingly harsh in their provisions. Under the Corporation Act religious and secular tests were combined. All magistrates and officers were compelled to participate in "the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the rites of the Church of England." They were also obliged to renounce the Solemn League and Covenant, and sincerely to swear that they deemed it unlawful in any circumstances to bear arms against the King or any of his majesty's officers. As Hallam justly states: "These provisions struck at the heart of the Presbyterian party, whose strength lay in the little oligarchies of corporate towns, which directly or indirectly returned to Parliament a very large proportion of its members."

The religious inferiority thrust upon Dissenters by this enactment lingered until 1824, when it was removed by the 9 Geo. IV. c. 17, although the political tests were abrogated in 1718, four years after the Hanoverian accession.

The Test Act, 1675, was largely directed against the plots of Popish recusants and this was to some extent justified by the critical character of the time. But the measure was so framed that it disqualified for public office almost every Protestant Dissenter. In the words of Professor Taswell-Langmead: "It provided that any persons holding office or place of trust,

civil or military . . . should publicly receive the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England, and also take the oath of supremacy and subscribe a Declaration against 'Transubstantiation.'" As a result, Catholics like Lord Clifford and the Duke of York were driven to resign their offices, the former his treasurership, and the latter his position as High Admiral.

It is noteworthy that neither Catholics nor Unitarians derived any benefit from the Toleration Act of 1688. Unitarians were debarred any civil or ecclesiastical appointment. Later, in the closing years of Queen Anne, clericalism was enthroned, and the meagre concessions of the Toleration Act were diminished. The Occasional Conformity Act and Schism Acts were distinctly reactionary. The first of these (1711) was aimed at Dissenters who observed their own form of worship while evading the Test Act by occasionally taking the Sacrament according to orthodox rites. The second Act (1713) was directed against the growth of schism, and was markedly intolerant in its provisions. Nonconformist instruction of children was to be prevented by the closing of all Dissenters' schools. Fortunately, these obscurantist enactments were repealed as early as 1718, under George I., while an accommodation was arranged in the reign of George II. when civil offices were made available to Dissenters by means of Annual Indemnity Acts. And although the severe laws against Romanists remained unrepealed, they were more mercifully administered as the years rolled by.

Nevertheless, the Marriage Act of 1753 proved a further impediment to toleration. This measure was overtly designed to prevent clandestine espousals, but it penalized Dissenters who were previously permitted to conduct the marriage ceremony in their own chapels. Under the new Act, all marriages save those of Jews and Quakers, were to be conducted by an Anglican clergyman, officiating in his own church according to the ritual of the State Establishment.

When, in the days of George III., it was deemed that the grave dangers arising from Romanist treason had passed away, and with the Nonconformist revival which inspired and succeeded the missions of Wesley and Whitefield, penalties on opinion were ameliorated. In our time the Bowman Judgment was delivered in the House of Lords. So, in 1767, Lord Mansfield sitting in the Supreme Court of Judicature, declared in the case of the City of London and the Dissenters that: "It is now no crime for a man to say he is a Dissenter; nor is it any crime for him not to take the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England; nay, the crime is, if he does it contrary to the dictates of his conscience."

A Bill for the partial relief of Catholics was passed in 1778, but this concession aroused a whirlwind of popular passion, which culminated in the No Popery riots of 1780, so vividly pictured by Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge*. Under this, and the later Act of 1791, priests were no longer liable to life-long imprisonment for performing their customary ministrations. Catholic peers were absolved from a sentence of banishment; the estates of Catholics educated abroad ceased to descend to the nearest Protestant heir; real estate could now be purchased and a certain liberty of education and religious observance was granted.

The Dissenting Ministers Act (1779) relieved Dissenting preachers and pedagogues from subscription to the 39 Articles, and in 1812 an Act released them from the oaths and declaration exacted by the Toleration Act. Disabilities endured by the Unitarians were also removed: the exception of Socinians from the provisions of the Toleration measure; as well as from the perils of the Act 9 and 10 William III., "for the sup-

pression of blasphemy and profaneness," was now made perfectly legal.

Those "monuments of bygone bigotry" the Test and Corporation Acts still disgraced the Statute Books of England. In 1718, Stanhope recommended the repeal of the Test Act, and in 1736 Plumer moved its repeal in the Commons, but Walpole, who was himself a sceptic, refused to support the motion and it was lost. Fifty years later Beaufoy twice endeavoured to abrogate the Statute, but the obscurantists were in a majority. The famous C. J. Fox, in 1790, strove to secure repeal, but still the spirit of intolerance proved too powerful. It was only in 1828 that Lord John Russell—Bertrand Russell's grandfather—succeeded in sweeping the iniquitous enactment away. Dissenters had at long last secured full civic rights, and were now eligible for office in civil, military and corporate bodies.

Then came the emancipation of the Catholics in 1829. Pitt was willing to grant this reform, but the obstinacy of George III. proved insuperable. But in the reign of his son the anomaly grew increasingly obvious, especially as Daniel O'Connell ceaselessly inflamed the emotions of the highly excitable Irish Catholics. The matter became so menacing that even the then Tory Administration under Wellington became convinced that Roman Catholic relief was now unavoidable. So, with Whig assistance, Wellington carried the Emancipation Bill through the two Chambers at Westminster. Even then, George IV. very reluctantly assented to the measure.

Catholics who were willing to take the oath of allegiance, which implied the denial of the Pope's right to commission or encourage the deposition or assassination of temporal sovereigns, were now admitted as members to both Houses of Parliament. All corporate offices, all judicial posts except those appertaining to Ecclesiastical Courts were open to them. Nor were Catholics any longer excluded from civic or political appointments save that of Regent, Lord Chancellor in England and Ireland and Lord Lieutenant in Ireland. But Romanists were restrained by the Act from any interference with the patronage of the Anglican Establishment. Also, monks and Jesuit priests were forbidden to enter Britain from abroad without a licence.

A further Act was passed in 1832 extending the rights of Romanists, and they participated in the liberties enjoyed by Dissenters in regard to their schools, charities and churches, while subsequently, in the reign of Victoria, nearly every surviving disability was annulled.

In 1833, Mr. Pease, the only Quaker who had been returned to Parliament for more than a century, was permitted to take his seat on substituting an affirmation for the orthodox oath. A few months later members of the Society of Friends, Moravians and Separatists were granted the right to affirm in any instance where an oath was required. Holyoake helped to extend this right further, but complete freedom was not gained until Charles Bradlaugh's Oaths Act made affirmation a statutory right to any witness or official who regarded the swearing of an oath as contrary to, or inconsistent with, his religious opinions or beliefs.

T. P. PALMER.

## The Untouchables

THE Freethinker's reliance on ratiocination does not imply a high belief in the rationality of the average man or woman. This is a matter of judgment. He knows full well that any appeal to the intellect, whether written in the vein of humour, satire or cool logic, will miss the target more often than not. It is this fact that accounts for the changed attitude of the daily press; once it set forth its columns in the belief that man was a rational animal and took pride in its syllogisms. This is now regarded in the main as so much waste time. Man it is stated, is a pack of prepossessions and prejudices; his leading characteristic is vanity, and if you take care to be on the side of his prejudices—he calls them beliefs—he will purr like a kitten and reward the paper who does it the most skilfully by periodically planking down his pennies.

Like calls to like, and the man who enjoys an argument, turn and turn about, is the rarest of beings. Prejudice in the great majority of cases will settle the issue. Not only that, but it will stretch out and display itself in many directions. Good Christians may not care for the theses of Voltaire, Bertrand Russell, Lytton Strachey. They are not content to say they disagree with their conclusions; they complain much more of their *methods*; they think they are horrible writers; they are even prepared to entertain at short notice any anecdote they may hear to their discredit. These writers have committed the unpardonable sin of stirring up the mush they call their *opinions*, and they (the readers) react to this unpleasantness as automatically as the wasp does when it feels its comfort endangered.

The average person when he has reached forty-five or thereabouts, thinks he has acquired the right to bang his fists on the table in lieu of reasoned discourse. Has he not lived and learnt! Should not those who have not yet had the intellectual ability to reach forty-five, listen and learn? Often, in the same way, does the mother of a child think that all the secrets of motherhood have been vouchsafed to her and expect the young girl without, or about to enter into, that experience to listen humbly to the words of wisdom of any old Prig or Harris.

Freethinkers must resign themselves to the limited audience and the small dose of appreciation. In spite of all temptations they have determined to speak to those who have ears to hear, and minds to reflect upon what they have heard. They have no use for the slogan. *Freethought is best* is not going to be plugged week in and week out in all spare corners of the *Freethinker*, without the accompanying reasons. The average man does not want reasons. He wants to feel that that which he drank in with his mother's milk is as true as it is comforting. He hates thinking as he hates nasty medicine. Any reasoning he is going to do is going to enable him to sell more bicycles, foreign stamps or safety-razors. That will bring him money; money will bring him comfort. Thinking! That can be left to the Nit Wits; those who don't know a good thing when they see one; those who don't know to come in when it is wet.

There is a golden mean in everything. Freethinkers must not neglect to spread the truth in any reputable way. Plugging may be abhorrent, but the lesson that there are some truths so important that they need constant repetition is an educational commonplace that must not be neglected. Because *Constant Reader* has read *ad nauseam* in our columns that professional followers of the Carpenter who preached Hell for the Rich, dwell in Palaces, dress sumptuously and eat with gusto, it does not mean that the point does not need constant re-emphasis. We are

What is the use of telling us now of the Church's neglected duties? The sufferings that Christianity might largely have relieved, and the sins and sorrows which it might largely have diminished, are being dealt with by other agencies. Let the Church learn its lesson, the people are taking their redemption into their own hands.—G. W. Foote.

not only concerned with the righteous; we call the sinner to repentance. Not by the use of the Slogan, but in other perfectly reputable and justifiable ways, a proportion of the columns of this paper will always be given to such home-truths as that Christianity is both as old as the hills and as young as last week; that the Bible contains all kinds of material, lofty, low and commonplace; that the God-Man Christ Jesus is modelled, as any plasticine figure, when every Tom, Dick and Harry care to set about it; that the meek are often aggressive; that those who have found the Peace of God are often turbulent; and that the art of living is a full-time job, calling for all our work and energy. And we will give you REASONS.

T. H. ELSTON.

## The Gentle Art of Prophecy

### II.

ACCORDING to those Protestants, who, during the nineteenth century, deemed they were God's instruments in destroying the "Scarlet Whore of Babylon," which was their elegant way of designating the rival Church of Christ, there were quite a number of distinct prophecies in the Bible. There was the "approaching end of the age"; there was the end of the Papacy; and there was the greatest event of all, the Second Coming of Christ. These were all linked up together, and numerous clerical and lay writers vied with each other in producing and publishing books based on calculations from the Bible, particularly from Daniel and Revelation. I must say these efforts were, to use a hackneyed phrase, monuments of ingenuity. The way the writers managed to make absurd Biblical figures (which were in truth nothing but fantastic rubbish) apply to our own times and difficulties is a tribute to their skilfulness, but not to their sanity.

It was the rise of Popery which dismayed them. The Oxford Movement resulted in a large number of conversions to Roman Catholicism, including such men as Newman and Manning; and this was bitterly resented though the Bible plainly said: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy." etc. (1 Tim. iv. 1-2). Were not the wholesale conversions to the Church of Rome here distinctly prophesied? And was not the length of time in which the Papacy would persist also prophesied?—"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." (Rev. xiii. 5). Here, forty-two months can mean anything that the prophets want them to mean—from forty-two days to forty-two centuries; and one has only got to read their works to see how these and similar figures can be manipulated to fit in with almost any prophecy. The net result of it all is, however, that Popery has by no means come to an end. That it will do so, of course, is certain; but the reason is, not that any of the insane prophecies in the Bible will have anything to do with it, but because all human institutions must eventually change or die.

The return of "Our Blessed Lord" is one of the clearest prophecies in the Bible; it was spoken by "Our Lord" himself and should have been fulfilled during the lifetime of his hearers. Unfortunately either he was misunderstood, or he was not reported correctly, or he did come again and nobody recognized him, or he will return in all his glory at a specified time clearly given in the Bible.

He should have come along last century; but the

faithful were badly let down. It is amusing to find the kind of threats made to those who refused to see in the approaching end of the age, or the Second Advent, any reason why they should be miserable. The late lamented prophet Baxter, the gentleman who never ceased giving fresh dates for the Second Coming every time the previous one failed, admonished his dupes as follows:—

You who are theatre-goers, gamblers, lovers of field sports, frequenters of fashionable parties, ball-rooms and concerts, revelling in luxury, clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day, novel readers, or perchance ardent lovers of the sciences and arts, poetry, painting, and music; but give little time to reading the Bible or prayerful communion with God; are you aware that unless you repent, and become converted and devoted to Christ, you will soon be cast into the bottomless pit, in which these cruel demons exist for the purpose of tormenting all persons within their reach? You may refuse to believe this; you may be persuaded by gay friends that it is a cunningly devised fable. You may try to shake off gloomy fears by plunging deep into business engagements or entertaining amusements. But God will not thus be mocked. His eye is upon you. . . .

and so on. This is not a caricature of true religion invented by Freethinkers. It is the kind of thing upon which many of our grandparents thrived. They believed it all to be true, and only through Freethought were they eventually emancipated. It was believed to be the genuine religion of Jesus Christ—and whether people like Newman or Lightfoot agreed with it or not, they do not seem to have attacked it. If Christians rarely get similar fulminations hurled at them now, they certainly cannot thank the leaders of the Church of England for the relief. But is it, or something like it, the kind of religion to which the Archbishop of Canterbury recalls us? And if not, why not? Does he not await the Second Advent with joy and anxious expectation?

The Great War naturally lent itself to some wonderful books dealing with prophecy. Could anything be more significant than the following facts? God willed the war to end

- (1) At the *eleventh* hour of the day.
- (2) On the *eleventh* day of the month.
- (3) In the *eleventh* month of the year.

(4) Exactly at the end of the *eleventh* month since General Allenby had entered Jerusalem on the *eleventh* day of December, 1917, and on the *eleventh* day from the signing of the Armistice with Turkey.

If *eleven* here is not impressed with divinity, nothing can be. All the same, in spite of the preponderance of elevens, Christ hasn't come yet. He should have done so, many, many times, but the facts have always gone against the figures, even such a divinely stamped figure as eleven obviously is.

It may be of interest to point out that the prophets who used the Great War as a sort of terminal point for the Second Coming, and who wrote voluminously about it, have proved, like Prophet Baxter, completely wrong. One of them, writing his *The Midnight Hour and After* in 1920, gave 1934 as the terminus of other important periods." 1934 has come and gone, and the Great Event of Christ's Second Coming is still awaited by the faithful. And this in spite of a large number of promised signs, meteoric displays, fall of giant meteorites, sun pillars, trade winds astray, waterspouts, hail as large as cricket balls, famines, sleepy sickness and other celestial marvels which ought to herald "Our Lord."

The worst of it is that so many of these prophets, working on exactly the same material, facts and figures, come to such different conclusions. I have by me a pamphlet written in 1914, by Mr. H. Norris. He was so certain of "Our Lord's" return that even in the edition published in 1918, he says, "I gave the year 1919 as a near approximation for this event, and I still believe that it will be either in that year, or in one closely to it." And certainly if the Bible be true, and the figures given therein are divinely inspired, 1919 or 1934 should have seen Jesus Christ come along in all his glory. As he did not, what are we to conclude?

And that is the question I should like to see the Archbishop of Canterbury and his friends answer. Does prophecy form part of their religion or not? Are they or are they not convinced of the Second Coming of Christ, and that somewhere near the date of that event can be calculated from the Bible? Will those who reject as drivel these figures and prophecies be considered religious so long as they subscribe to "Our Lord" in other ways? And what do "sane" Churchmen think of the prophets?

Prophets may or may not be understood in their own countries; there is one thing, however, that can be said of them all through history. With very few exceptions, whether divinely inspired or not, they have almost always been proved wrong. The only sure way to be right is to prophesy *after* the event.

H. CUTNER.

#### THE RIGHTS OF MAN

There never did, there never will, and there never can, exist a Parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country, possessed of the right or the power of binding and controlling posterity to the "end of time," or of commanding for ever how the world shall be governed or who shall govern it; and therefore all such clauses, acts or declarations by which the makers of them attempt to do what they have neither the right nor the power to do, nor the power to execute, are in themselves null and void. Every generation must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the ages and generations which preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most insolent and the most ridiculous of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations that have to follow. The Parliament of the people of 1688, or of any other period, had no more right to dispose of the people of the present day, or to bind or control them in any shape whatever, than the Parliament or the people of the present day have to dispose of, bind or control those who are to live a hundred or a thousand years hence. Every generation is, and must be, competent to all the purposes which its occasions require. It is the living, and not the dead, that have to be accommodated. When man ceases to be, his power and his wants cease with him; and having no longer any participations in the concerns of this world, he has no longer any authority in directing who shall be his governors, or how its Government shall be organized, or how administered.

I am contending for the rights of the *living*, and against their being willed away and controlled and contracted for by the manuscript assumed authority of the dead. . . . There was a time when Kings disposed of their crowns by will upon their death-beds, and consigned the people, like beasts of the eld, to whatever successor they appointed. This is now so exploded as scarcely to be remembered, and so monstrous as hardly to be believed.—Thomas Paine, from "*The Rights of Man*."

#### Acid Drops

Simple people appear to be under the impression that the Roman Church is guilty of hypocrisy when, in spite of its opposition to the marriage of divorced persons, it sanctions such marriages—when it suits its purpose. The impression is due to want of acquaintance with the policy of the "great lying Church." For example; the press lately gave publicity to the marriage of Mr. d'Erlanger, a well known Roman Catholic, with the fashionable Roman Catholic preacher, Father Woodlock, officiating. But the bridegroom had gone through the divorce court, and to the Roman Church divorce is anathema. How does the situation arise?

Mr. d'Erlanger had been previously married in a Registrar's office, and the *Universe*, the leading Roman Catholic paper in this country, explains that "it was no marriage in the eyes of the Church, and he (Mr. d'Erlanger) was free to contract the marriage that Father Woodlock blessed. All the divorce case did was to free him, as a citizen, from the civil consequences of the register office ceremony." This is in accord with the official Roman Catholic position, for in the words of Pope Pius IX., "civil marriage, celebrated independently of the Church is considered, as it is in reality, as mere concubinage." And, as is now explained, if two people have gone through a ceremony of marriage in a Registrar's office, that being in the eyes of the Church no marriage at all, there can be, so far as they are concerned, no real divorce, since there has been no real marriage. It is said by apologists in this country that the Roman Church admits the validity of civil marriage, so far as non-Catholics are concerned, but that we beg to point out is open to question. The declaration of Pius IX. is absolute. Civil marriage is "mere concubinage," and if the man or woman who has been living in such concubinage, comes before the Roman priest to be married, they are as though they had never been married at all. The pretence of admitting a marriage in a Registrar's office as valid between non-Catholics is a mere subterfuge. As to the statement that all a divorce court does is to relieve a Roman Catholic married in a Registrar's office "from the civil consequences of the register office ceremony," that we may point out is the purpose of Mr. Herbert's Marriage Bill, and Roman Catholics have, apparently no objection from taking advantage of it in one direction while roundly denouncing it in another.

So we may sum up the matter by saying that (1) To the Roman Church marriage in a Registrar's office is no marriage at all, and the contracting parties, in the eyes of the Church, while under legal obligations, so far as the secular State is concerned, are under no obligations in the eyes of the Church. (2) When a Roman Catholic who has contracted a civil marriage and secures a divorce, he may come to his own Church as one who has never been married, and never having been married, cannot have been divorced. (3) Were it not for the civil law a Roman Catholic in this country may marry—in a Registrar's office—discard his wife, without risking penalties of any kind, and then come before his priest to be married for the *first time*, and without having incurred any responsibility towards the woman with whom he had gone through a ceremony of civil marriage. Religiously, he would just have thrown a concubine on one side and entered on the path of "holy Matrimony." It is well to realize what the Roman Church really is, and also to remember that it was against its bitter opposition and that of the clergymen of other Churches that civil marriage was established in this country.

The historic truth is that in spite of the Church being officially against divorce, under Church law, there are at least a dozen different situations where the Church declares a marriage invalid, and the party or parties are free to marry again. (We think the total number of causes is sixteen). As it suits the policy of the papacy one or the other of these causes are permitted to operate. The trick is played on the words "valid" and "validity." The Church is firm against divorce,

Terminology.—"What does the bride think when she walks into the church?" "Aisle, Altar, Hymn."

but it does declare a marriage invalid, and so enables either of the parties to marry again. Consanguinity was a very favourable plea where crowned heads were concerned, and "error" or wrong "spiritual relationship," or "insanity" with those of lesser degree. It would be interesting to know what political power the Church gained and what wealth it received in connexion with these cases. But by declaring a marriage to be annulled, and so liberating the parties concerned the Church has managed to keep alive its fiction of the indissolubility of marriage. But then a religious morality that is not a good fifty per cent hypocrisy loses its "spiritual" quality. In fact the causes which the Church may, if it pleases, consider sufficient to warrant a marriage being declared "invalid," and the parties qualified for re-marriage, are numerous enough almost to satisfy Mr. Herbert. The fundamental facts appear to be that the Church resolves (1) to keep the power of dissolving marriage in its own hands, and (2) to keep it away from the "common" people.

Apparently there must have been a devil of a noise in heaven on July 14, and between the hours of ten and one o'clock. It seems that during the past year the Methodist Church has lost 10,000 members, so the Methodist Church sent out a confidential circular to every Methodist minister, asking him to pray to the Lord for three hours on July 14 to do something about it. Nine hundred prayed for three hours at Eastbrook Hall, Bradford, and every minister was at it all over the country. If God tuned-in to this sustained asinine bray, we wonder what on earth, or heaven, or hell, he thought about it. He must have known that people had been leaving the Methodist Church in such numbers. Perhaps he thought they wouldn't be missed. Perhaps he thinks they were not worth keeping. Perhaps he remembers Barnum's dictum that there is a fresh fool born every minute, and feels sure that he will never lack worshippers while that remains true. But what a racket! Thousands of men all praying at once and all saying different things. And God is expected to listen for three hours. Poor God!

The articles that have been running through the *News-Chronicle*, on "What I Believe," have been of a very mixed character, although a little more unbelief has been allowed to creep in than is usually the case. But the writers have been carefully chosen, and none has been invited to contribute who would have made an uncompromising attack on established belief. Those who might have spoken out have toned down their disbelief in Christianity with concessions that make the writer stand out as a poor, struggling, perplexed individual against the calm, confident Christian. We do not wonder when Christians condescendingly offer their sympathy with men and women who picture themselves as floundering in the bog of unbelief. They deserve the sympathy of this type of Christian, and we hope they enjoy the humiliation of getting it.

So we sympathise with the comment of the *Church Times* on a recent article by Mr. Gerald Bullett, when it says that he has furnished "a fine example of muddled thinking." Mr. Bullett does not believe in a God unless he is "a dynamic metaphor"; then God becomes "a cardinal fact of human experience." We are not surprised to find the *Church Times* commenting, "We find this sort of pedantic nonsense, to which the intellectual unbeliever is addicted, infinitely tiresome." So do we, and we hope that Mr. Bullett will not be taken as a sample of the intellectual unbeliever. God as a dynamic metaphor, is about as ridiculous as God, as a mathematical symbol. Lack of clear thinking is obviously an ingredient in this kind of clotted nonsense, but so also is the disinclination to face the social and business ostracism which Christian bigotry inflicts upon those who voice their opposition to Christianity in plain and unmistakable language. It is certain that while religion is strong enough to make people suffer by social or business ostracism for a plain confession of Atheism, so long will the "weaker brethren" accompany their statements of doubt concerning Christianity with a number of dishonouring and stupid qualifications. They do not be-

lieve, so they must profess belief in a kind-of-a-sort-of-a-something that will mark them off from those who express their non-religion in plain unmistakable language.

The Rev. F. E. England appears to be a man considerably above the average parson, but one cannot touch pitch without being defiled, and the most able man who has to defend an absurd creed must lapse into foolishness. Dr. England says that "God makes himself known to us even upon the smallest leaf of a tree." We are no authority on such a matter, but we wonder why a God who makes himself so prominent escapes observation from so very many people. Perhaps an occasional, and unmistakable appearance might bring him into greater notice. But why the devil God should be as elusive as he appears to be, is another puzzle we venture to give Dr. England to solve.

The Rev. H. J. Dale thinks that some of the churches of our day are not the true Simon Pure he wishes to see. In fact, he says they boast of "Flabby Faiths which Shame the Name of Religion." He says:—

Religion is not publicly denounced: it is treated with contempt and an air of superiority. Old sanctions are discarded as belonging to an outgrown piety. God is politely bowed out of human concerns as though man had reached a point at which supernatural intervention was no longer required.

It is all very terrible, of course, but Mr. Dale fails completely to show why and how "supernatural intervention" is wanted, and who (or Who) is to blame that it is never forthcoming. It is a queer sort of "supernatural intervention" which requires Mr. Dale's guarantees, and which even Churches—however "flabby"—no longer regard as existent. Fancy an Omnipotent Deity intervening, but being unable or unwilling to prove it!

We have no reason to doubt the statements made by the *British Weekly* about the state of affairs in Italy. We have heard much about Germany, but things are certainly no better in Italy as far as freedom of thought is concerned. The *British Weekly* says it is a matter of common rumour in Italy that the Vatican helped to finance the Abyssinian War. In return the Vatican demanded suppression of all the "opposition" churches in Italy. A thousand members of a single sect have been arrested, and there is no doubt that a large number of Freethinkers have been imprisoned since the beginning of the Fascist regime. The *British Weekly* says that the Salvation Army has up to now obtained toleration because several Protestant countries have intervened on its behalf. We have yet to hear of any Government—or any Church—protesting against the suppression of Freethought anywhere.

## Fifty Years Ago

MR. HAWES, as a "modern" Christian, may attract a few Christians who are ashamed of the worst features of orthodoxy, but at best his school of thought, to use his own words, is accidental and transitory. His Christianity is not like Catholic theology, a laborious deduction from the Bible and the Fathers; it is an arbitrary sentimentalism, indefinite as clouds, fantastic as dreams, and doomed to sterility. Fortunately there is an unconscious logic in the human mind, and the chaos of a creed without doctrines cannot be permanent. It is a sign of dissolution, and in that sense it may be welcome. But it is no pioneer of truth. It is, indeed, a hindrance, for it urges men to live among the *débris* of an ancient faith rather than seek new foundations for a grander structure. On the moral side it is cowardice, on the mental side confusion. Mr. Hawes professes great admiration for Renan, and we commend to his attention the motto we have selected from that great writer, who if he has some of the sentimentalisms of his race, has also its trenchant logic. *Malheur au vague! mieux vaut le faux*—"A pest on the vague! the false is better."

*The Freethinker*, July 24, 1887.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2,412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S. W. WILLIAMS AND F. C. HOLDEN.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; papers being sent.

J. CLAYTON.—You are quite right in what you say. The N.S.S. is always willing to help in an effort that falls into line with its avowed programme. But it will not be made a tool of by any organization, or permit itself to be pushed into the background in any movement in which it plays a part.

L. M. ATKINSON.—Christianity is too lively a corpse to justify the attitude you suggest.

T. L. (Selby).—Glad you like Ingersoll's *The Truth about the Church*. Ingersoll never dates, as he dealt with fundamentals.

H. SMITH (Wakefield).—Your experience has been that of many others. The *Freethinker* only shocks where uniformity of opinion has been the atmosphere in which the reader has been reared. Most, as in your case, soon see they obtain something they cannot afford to be without.

F. C. HOLDEN (U.S.A.).—Thanks for cuttings.

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. Roselli, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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

## Sugar Plums

It has been suggested that an outing by coach, including a visit to Thomas Paine's house at Lewes, Sussex, be arranged for a day in September. The cost, including coach, lunch and tea, will be 12s. per head. Will those wishing to book seats notify the General Secretary, N.S.S., 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, not later than August 16.

The General Secretary, N.S.S. will be on vacation from July 31, and during that time only matters of urgency will receive attention. Details which can be forwarded to Headquarters before that date will help to prevent congestion.

Several of our readers have written asking for the story referred to in our last issue, as told by James Thomson (B.V.), the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*. Thomson was an Atheist and a Republican as well as a poet. He wrote "Your composite theology is still alive, is insolently aggressive, its lust for tyrannical dominion is unbounded; therefore we must attack it if we would not be enslaved by it." His brilliant religious satires were therefore deliberate. They were printed in the *National Reformer* and *Secularist*. Religion in the Rocky Mountains purports to be a report couched

in terms of dissatisfaction, of the healthy state of religion in the Rockies, as evidenced by the everyday conversation of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, which proved them to be saturated with the idiom of Christian belief.

A certain miner, a tough cuss, who could whip his weight in wild cats and give points to a grizzle, seemed uncommonly moody and low-spirited one morning, and on being questioned by his chum, at length confessed that he was bothered by a queer dream. "I dreamt that I was dead," he explained; "and a smart spry pretty little angel took me up to heaven." "Dreams go by contraries," suggested the chum, by way of comfort. "Let that slide," answered the dreamer; "the point isn't there. Wall, St. Peter wasn't at the gate, and the angel critter led me on to pay my respects to the boss, and after travelling considerable we found him as thus. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost and Peter, all as large as life, were playing a high-toned game of poker, and there was four heavy piles on the table—gold, not shin-plasters, you bet. I was kinder glad to see they played poker up in heaven, so as to make life there not unbearable; for it would be but poor fun singing psalms all day; I was never much at a hand at singing, more particularly when the songs is psalms. Wall, we waited, not liking to disturb their game, and I watched the play. I soon found that Jesus Christ was going through the rest, cheating worse than the heathen Chinee at euchre; but, of course, I didn't say nothing, not being in the game. After a while Peter showed that he began to guess it too, if he wasn't quite sure; or p'raps he was skeared at up and telling Christ to his face. At last, however, what does Christ do, after a bully bluff which ran Pete almost to his bottom dollar, but up and show five aces to Pete's call; and "What's that for high?" says he, quite cool. "Now look you, Christ," shouts Pete, jumping up as mad as thunder, and not caring a cent or a continental what he said to anybody; "look you, Christ, that's too thin; we don't want any of your darned miracles here."

Mr. G. Whitehead's visit to Bath last year was so encouraging that a return date was booked in this year's programme, and Mr. Whitehead will address meetings each evening this week. Details will be found in the Lecture Notices column, and the support of local saints will be welcomed. Pioneer Press literature will be on sale at all meetings.

One of the Inspectors of Schools has been saying nasty things about one of the Church schools in Houldsworth, and the *Stockport Advertiser* reports of July 2, has the following from the Rev. R. W. Watson, taken from the July issue of the St. Elizabeth's parish magazine:—

The report referred to "difficult and harassing conditions" in which the staff has to work owing to the teaching of more than one class in each room, and also criticized the cloakroom and wash basin facilities.

"A stranger, reading these comments," states the Rector, "would be led to imagine that the Houldsworth School was on its last legs, and in an unsatisfactory condition. I venture to say that such an idea is very far from the reality.

"The report stated that we have only one wash bowl for the girls, and a bucket in a sink for the boys. I am not out to contradict that statement, but I thought the Houldsworth School was a school, and not a wash-house, and as the scholars are only there three hours in a morning, and two and half hours in the afternoon, I should have thought they could wash before they leave home, and on their return. I should imagine that the children of fifty years ago were as particular about their person as the children of to-day, and the arrangement served them.

"Further, the Inspector objected to three or four classes in one very large, lofty range. For a new teacher this condition of things may be a little trying, but they soon get accustomed to it, and I consider the inconvenience is far out-weighed by the fresher atmosphere, as compared with an enclosed classroom."

That is quite clear. The school in question is kept open, not for the purpose of keeping the children clean, but to see that they are trained so as to grow up faithful mem-

bers of the Church. For that reason they are kept away from Council schools where the lavatory accommodation is adequate, and sent to a school where their souls are properly attended to. Cleanliness will not save their souls, dirt will not disqualify them from entering heaven. Mr. Watson occupies a very strong theological position. Damn the dirt, look after their souls, is a good orthodox Christian position.

We welcome the following unsolicited testimonial to the advance of Freethinking from the Rev. C. Ensor Walters, President of the Methodist Conference :—

My attitude for the year is accompanied by some anxiety and misgivings. When I think of the splendid gatherings the warm enthusiasm and the deep spiritual note, it is so hard to remember facts which must be faced. There is the decline in membership, there is a falling-off in congregations, and there is the fact that our Sunday School statistics give cause for concern. Then we have local financial problems which are very perplexing. In my Presidential Address to the Newcastle Conference I pictured Methodism at the cross-roads, hesitant and perplexed, and I have noted that so far there has been no sign since Union of any marked advance.

We hope by continued Freethought efforts during the coming year to increase the Methodist Conference President's "anxiety and misgivings."

## Human Kinship

THE thing that has militated most against a general combination among human beings for mutual protection, mutual aid and mutual benefit is religion. It has been the most divisive force in human relationships all through history. In a perfect state of society, there would be no rich and no poor; and human development would have proceeded much more surely and successfully to that goal but for religious dissensions. Man, unhampered by the bonds of superstitious belief in some fancied supernatural state, would have sought the good of his kind instead of becoming the victim of a system of intellectual and moral tyranny instituted by clerics. By subjection to religious belief, men assumed that their first and chief duty was to God, and so long as they could make their peace with God, it did not matter a tuppenny damn how much they exploited their fellows for their own personal enrichment and aggrandisement.

So economically a race began, in which the doctrine held good of "Everyone for himself and the Devil take the hindmost." *Sauve qui peut!* And the man who was the best able regularly to fill his own belly; and to secure the best shelter and clothing for himself became, by the force of circumstances, the headman and ruler of his fellows. And so it continues unto this day. Brains have been prostituted for bullion; and might is right.

Inevitably, as this system took a hold, there arose, time and again, rebels against the rulers; and the world has seen a succession of bloody conflicts, all of which are traceable to this root cause of dissension born of religious belief. The ardent religious believer, who is likewise a very wealthy man, is concerned above all with his duty to God and the spread of God's kingdom; and it is he who dictates what the clerics are to preach and teach. He and his peers in course of time came to look on the ignorant and less cunning masses of men as mere beasts of burden, hewers of wood, drawers of water and periodical cannon fodder. The nature and amount of the sustenance allowed to the masses depended and now depend entirely upon the whim or caprice of the ruling class. The results of the revolt of unorganized sansculottism at any time is not a pretty spectacle; but they need never have distressed human eyes and

hearts but for the licence that religion has always given to the very rich :—

Oh Heaven, that bread should be so dear,  
And flesh and blood so cheap!

If the term "justice" has any vital significance there should be some hot corners for the cornerers of the food of the common people!

It is therefore the most melancholy fact of existence that human beings, in obedience to the supposed edict of a supposed supernatural Ruler, should have erected barriers of illwill between themselves, and made natural fellowship and good will impossible things. The uncivilized savage—like children at play—meets his fellows on a simple, unambiguous and common footing. The civilized Christian meets his on a footing of equivocation, emulation and mutual suspicion—of affectation and reserve. He must meet his fellows as something in uniform, badged and labelled. This is the monstrous state of mind produced by religious belief and an artificial "Christian" civilization. This is the alienating and hate-producing monstrosity that religious belief has thrust upon civilized man.

Now, there are myriads of thoroughly decent men and women who would disclaim with heat the suggestion that they are chargeable with taking up such an artificial attitude towards their neighbours. But the unhappy thing is that when anyone gives the barest assent to this heart-corroding religious belief, he takes his place in the ranks of those who regard non-believers as untouchables, outcasts and pariahs; and members of other religious communities throughout the earth as "benighted heathens." Ah, no doubt, we have pointed out to us so-called religious leaders here and there who are open to embrace anyone of good will whatever his belief. That is one of the signs—and catches—of the time! But such a person has no deep-seated religious faith as defined by clericalism. Definite dogma has no hold of him. And what is faith without dogma? It has become merely sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal! And that is just what the Christian modernists are: blowers of brass trumpets and bangers of tinkling cymbals. Take for example the Buchmanites *et hoc genus omne*.

Some people calling themselves advanced thinkers profess to be opposed to "Clericalism" and "Theology"; but they do contend that what the world requires is "religion." But they further reserve the right to give their own definition of "religion" as derived from the Latin word *ligere* = to bind: an influence binding men together in fellowship and good will for mutual service. What is to be noted here is that these advanced thinkers dismiss all idea of the supernatural from their conception of "religion." But if we consult the leading dictionaries, we find that the primary and essential meaning of the term in the general and popular acceptance of it is "obedience to and worship of a supernatural Power." The present writer has already penned urgent warnings and protests against the use of the term "religion" by Rationalists, as something having or calculated to have a beneficent influence. We have to realize what "religion" means to the average man—the man-in-the-street—and in almost every instance he will be found to regard the term "religion" as inevitably and indissolubly identified with belief in worship of and obedience to the supernatural. The veneer that coats many conceals a primitiveness as enslaving and debasing as is to be found—frank and un-concealed—in the most ignorant savage.

Oh, how the leading believers in religion long to bring their religion up to date! Humanity changes; human thoughts change; with the discoveries and inventions of men, new ideas are imported into the daily currency of human life. What line are believers to

take, seeing that their God never changes? Several of these new ideas make the existence and authority of the God of the Bible simply ludicrous. Ah well, here is a pioneer, here is a champion of the faith; here is the new "Big Noise" in the person of Alfred Noyes, who is actually going to show us that Voltaire was a Christian saint, who justly inveighed against the clerical and priestly delinquencies of his time! We have all been wrong, according to Noyes, in ascribing to Voltaire any hostility to belief in the supernatural. He hated bad priests, but he loved the good God! Well, some of us may prefer the views of John Morley to those of Alfred Noyes, one of that specious school of Christians who seek to vindicate their belief by subordinating as non-essentials to it clericalism and professional theology. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird! Can anyone doubt the effects of the weapons wielded by Voltaire—satire and ridicule? As Morley put it: "When men had learnt to laugh at superstition, then they would perceive how abominable is the oppressive fanaticism which is its champion."

"I always speak humanly," said Voltaire, "I always put myself in the place of the man who having never heard tell either of Jews or Christians, should read these books (the Bible) for the first time, and not being illuminated by grace should be so unhappy as to trust unaided reason in the matter until he should be enlightened from on high."

Yes, to think humanly, to speak humanly, consistently to act humanly, will finally teach us to do these things humanly also, in contradistinction to the inhuman practices which have been the inevitable outcome of belief in, obedience to, worship and dependence upon a supernatural ruler, and which have alienated man from man. Surely every historical pointer shows us that human brotherhood is impossible on a theocratic basis. Human kinship can never be made a real and lasting thing except by means of the cement of pure and noble human affection. In time, man full of respect for his manhood submits himself to the review of his brother man, whose judgment he esteems. He cannot with respect for his manhood accept the judgment of any other. Give man his due: God can take his own.

IGNOTUS.

## The Poison of Fiction

(Concluded from page 459)

REAL escape from drudgery is only to be attained by greater and greater mastery over the realities which create the drudgery—not by burying our heads in the sands of unreality. And how can anyone master realities except by logical thought, practical effort, and the attainment of greater knowledge of facts? The reading of fiction helps one to none of these things. Doubtless there are novels in which fact and logic are introduced. But unless our experience of realities is already wide to begin with, who is there among us that is capable of sifting the wheat from the chaff? There is at least as much, if not far more, nonsense, illogicality, false suggestion, and perverted history or fact to be found in the realms of fiction (prose and poetry) as there is truth or reason. And the mixture renders the latter indistinguishable from the former, and therefore useless.

Why do so many thousands swallow their newspapers as though they were undeniable fact? Because ever since childhood their credulity and ignorance have been fostered by fiction. So when they read something which purports to be fact, it amounts almost to "gospel truth." Why do so many thousands indulge

in a "flutter," or go in for lotteries and other forms of gambling? Because ever since childhood fiction has encouraged their belief in "good luck," and the attainment of power or wealth without effort. Why are so many thousands content to grumble at their lot, and wish they had this or that, and yet do nothing about it? Because the persistent indulgence in fiction acts as a dope without adding one iota to their knowledge or capacity to deal practically with the realities of life. Why are the intellects of thousands so narrow and circumscribed by the petty affairs of their immediate surroundings? Because their knowledge of facts has been needlessly curtailed by the practice of reading fiction. It is only at school, with its attendant nuisances of compulsory *work* and *lessons*, that children learn facts. Is it surprising that, in later life, the acquisition of facts in any form should generally be regarded as tiresome?

Personally, since abandoning the reading of fiction some twelve years ago, I have often regretted that I was not induced, at an early age, to read nothing but books of fact. To-day I find novels or poems (whether they be regarded as masterpieces or otherwise) painfully dull or silly as compared with almost any book of fact. Let it be biography, history, travel, science, philosophy or what not, the worst written book of fact does at least tell me something about things that really are. What is more, I have found that fact is immeasurably more interesting and entertaining than fiction. I do not say "stranger than fiction," because I realize that the imagination can invent fantasies which may be stranger than fact, although they are as useless and meaningless as the ravings of a lunatic. But what value or use is there in a mentality that needs to be constantly gaping open-mouthed at marvels, or to be titillated by curiosities which it does not understand? There are far more genuine pleasure and satisfaction to be gained from intelligent knowledge than from ignorant wonderment.

Civilization is still in its infancy, and humanity retains many traces of its primitive conditions. In early times ignorance of the facts and phenomena of life was inevitable. Fear and wonderment were the natural concomitants of this ignorance, which gave birth to mistaken and distorted explanations. Knowledge, which could only be passed on from mouth to mouth, was an inextricable jumble of fact and fiction. We, of to-day, are not surprised at the incredible nonsense which was formerly accepted as fact by the generations of long ago. Yet, with all the means available for the easy attainment of real knowledge, we of to-day are still saturated with the primitive taste for fantasy. Admittedly most of the fiction now written approximates more nearly to fact than the tales of the past. But this is just a camouflage to conceal its real nature, and to make it more palatable or excusable to our professed sophistication. Stripped of all its trappings, fiction is nothing more than palatable lies. Reading it gives us nothing worth having and gets us nowhere. It is an insidious poison, the taste for which, once acquired, is most difficult to lose.

From my own experience, as well as from the experience of others who have followed my advice, I can assure all those who derive pleasure or recreation from reading, that once they have acquired the habit of reading nothing but books of fact, they will never revert to their former habit of reading fiction. The satisfaction they will get is akin to and not much less than the sense of intellectual freedom which is experienced when we finally shed the last vestige of our religious beliefs. I appeal to all intelligent persons, for their own sakes and for the sake of future generations, to delay no longer in their effort to eradicate, at least from their own systems, the mind-numbing effects of the poison of fiction.

C. S. FRASER.

## To Read the Bible is to Disbelieve It

A FEW months ago, there appeared in the *Freethinker* an article of mine under the heading, "Divine Guidance or Divine Devastation?"

Simultaneously with the arrival in Sydney (N.S.W., Australia), of the issue containing it, I received from a stranger in England, a long, kindly-written letter, protesting against attacks designed to discredit the Bible. Why remove the crutch of comfort that it represents to those who believe in it? Such, in substance, was the point that the writer sought to enforce.

I felt that a brief reply—that is, brief in view of the magnitude of the subject—might fittingly be made through the *Freethinker*.

Firstly, I reject the Bible because I regard it as an imposition on the human race. There is, I consider, nothing Divine about it. I reject it, too, because it is a barrier to the progress of the world; and because of the opportunity it affords the hosts of clerical parasites to prey upon their fellow human-beings.

Every advance in knowledge the world has made has been—not because of the Bible—but in spite of the Bible.

The Bible has given us nothing. For example, is there between its two covers a word that pointed the way to printing; to steam or electricity; to the present-day marvels in curative and surgical skill; or to astronomy? So long as the church could do so, it opposed—bitterly and unrelentingly—the adoption of any discovery that was at variance with the Bible. Similarly has it tried to impede practically every advance in humanitarian legislation. Even to-day we have before us its attitude with regard to divorce.

Just recently, the binding, degrading influence that it still exerts in this respect was strikingly illustrated in the Duke of Norfolk ("The premier Earl of England") having slavishly and servilely to approach the Pope for a dispensation whereby he might marry a Protestant.

Further—and still further, I might indefinitely go on—I reject the Bible because of the instrument it is in the exploitation of the masses. Everywhere, the exhortation from the pulpits is for the people to be content with whatever God had given them—or, more correctly, with what he has so signally failed to give them. Suppressed in this way at its birth—if suppressed it could be—would be every movement that has been made for the social betterment of the race. Millions, too, have been encouraged to face death in war by the promise of the heaven that awaits them. Propagandists, in short, are the clerics of every denomination—the servants, if not the hirelings, of privilege and caste.

Briefly, then, I reject the Bible—not alone because it is destitute of the least supernatural authority—but because it is so clearly the enemy of enlightenment and progress, and because of what it directly represents in the way of class bias—the active promotion of the interests of the more fortunate at the expense of the less fortunate.

What is the Bible—I might here ask, for the particular benefit of my letter-writer from England—that it should ever have become the accepted authority for the power that has been so widely exercised in the name of it?

All I propose to do in reply to this question is to refer to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. In this we get a clear insight into the character of the God of the Bible. It is a Catholic edition of that book that I happen to have beside me.

The Lord, we are told, appeared to Moses in "a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush," and Moses saw that "the bush was on fire" and "the Lord burnt not." To Moses the Lord said, "I have seen the afflictions of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry, because of the rigour of them that are over the works; and knowing their sorrow, I have come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians."

But Moses, when he learns that he is to be the instrument of this deliverance, wants to be satisfied that the person so addressing him is the Lord.

The Lord asks, "What is that thou holdest in thy hand?" The reply is that it is a rod. Moses is commanded to cast it on the ground. Thereupon it was turned into a serpent. The Lord said, "Put out thy

hand, and take it by the tail." The result of Moses doing this was that it again became a rod.

Convinced by this and other magical transformations that the worker of them was the Lord, we come to these further passages:—

And the Lord said unto Moses, "Behold I have appointed thee a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.

"Thou shalt speak to him all that I command thee, and he shall speak to Pharaoh, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land.

"But I shall harden his heart, and shall multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.

"And he shall not hear you; and I will lay my hand upon Egypt, and will bring forth my army and my people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt, by very great judgments."

The stage thus being set, Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh; and Aaron—to impress Pharaoh, in keeping with the Lord's instructions—turns a rod into a serpent. But Pharaoh was not to be so easily caught. He produced magicians who were capable of the same feat.

This failure by Moses and Aaron is reported to the Lord, who—taking the rod—says, "Behold, I will strike with the rod, that is in my hand, the water of the river, and it shall be turned into blood; and the fishes that are in the river shall die, and the waters shall be corrupted; and the Egyptians shall be afflicted when they drink the water that is in the river."

The Lord did this—the river being corrupted, and there being "blood in all the land of Egypt."

But "the Egyptians with their enchantments did in like manner," with the result that we next find the Lord saying to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, and thou shalt say to him, 'Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go to sacrifice to me; but if thou wilt not let them go, behold, I will strike all thy coasts with frogs.'"

Throughout, let it be distinctly remembered, the Lord had determined to harden Pharaoh's heart so that, whatever the visitation, he would not let the Israelites go. Surely a great plan, this—designedly to prevent a man from compliance, and then to punish him for non-compliance! The punishment thus inflicted embraced, at the same time, endless other human beings and harmless, unoffending creatures.

"Frogs came up," we read, "and covered the land of Egypt."

Pharaoh appealed to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Pray ye to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."

But when this is done, the Lord again hardens Pharaoh's heart, with the result that there follow in turn a plague of sciniphs, a plague of flies, a plague of murrain, and a plague of rain, hail, and lightning. Great, of course, were these respective devastations.

But the Lord was ever-mindful of the Israelites. Respecting the impending plague of rain, hail, and lightning, we find him saying to Moses and Aaron, "Send therefore now presently and gather together thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field, for men and beasts, and all things that shall be found abroad, and not gathered together out of the fields, which the hail shall fall upon, shall die."

Nor must we forget the plague of darkness that overspread the entire land!

But there was still another to come. "At midnight," the Lord is reported as saying, "I will enter into Egypt.

"And every first-born in the land of the Egyptians shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh, who sitteth on his throne, even to the first-born of the handmaid that is at the mill, and all the first-born of beasts.

"And there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as neither hath been before, nor shall be hereafter.

"But with all the children of Israel there shall not a dog make the least noise, from man even to beast, that you may know how wonderful a difference the Lord maketh between the Egyptians and Israel."

Then, for this particular night, the Lord directed the killing by every Israelitish family of "a lamb without blemish," and the taking of the blood thereof and putting

Correspondence

THE ALL-MERCIFUL, GOD MYTH

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—With some reservations, I appreciate the letter by Mr. John A. Tysom in the *Freethinker* of May 23, in reply to my remarks in an earlier issue.

"The carnivorous animal," says Mr. Tysom, "kills his prey in the heat of the chase; and Nature's mechanism has provided that, when the nervous system is keyed up in the effects of escape or self-defence, the sensation of pain are reduced to a minimum."

May it not be that the pursued animal, in its efforts to escape, suffers all the fear and pain that would go with death in any other way? I merely ask the question. In any case—that is, whether the methods of man are more cruel than the methods of Nature—the responsibility for the infliction of death in the process of sustaining life lies with the Creator. That—and that alone, in this connexion—is the point I desire to make.

Colonel Ingersoll repudiated any mercifulness in a dispensation in a world where all life, he declared, was sustained at the expense of other life or lives—in other words a world wherein every mouth was a slaughter-house, and every stomach a tomb.

The facts, I submit, fully justify the simile.

Mr. Tysom refers to the human race being vegetarian by descent. That is true enough. But in our development we have undergone considerable changes. For example, we have substituted clothes and homes for what were once hairy skins and primitives abodes. Might it not be, in the way of the more effectively adapting ourselves to our surroundings, that we were equally justified in including flesh as a part of our diet? Again, I merely ask the question.

Mr. Tysom, in dissenting from the pronouncement by Ingersoll as too sweeping, says that only a minority of mouths—animal or human—are slaughter-houses.

Why did not Mr. Tysom include insect-life? Astronomical is the destruction in this respect—by the human race in order that it may reap the crops upon which even vegetarians are dependent for their existence, and by birds in order that they, too, may live. Birds themselves are killed by other birds. Further, what of the devastation of life, for the sustenance of life, that is for ever going on in the creeks, the rivers, and the oceans? I pass over the carnage that is similarly the order in the jungle.

Let me repeat, that to me the terms used by Ingersoll—in a general, all-embracing way—are fully justified.

I am sure that Mr. Tysom will realize that, after all, it is only in non-essential details that we differ. My contention was (1) the callousness of Christians in killing, with the complacency that they were merely exercising a God-conferred right, and (2) the utter refutation of an all-good, all-merciful, all-loving God by the creation of a world wherein—to again revert to the words of Ingersoll—every mouth is a slaughter-house and every stomach a tomb.

And this Ingersoll indictment remains sufficiently substantiated for my purpose—even if Mr. Tysom rightly feels that it might slightly be modified.

FRANK HILL.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

NATURE CURE

SIR,—As a newcomer to your extremely interesting and constructive paper, I should like to add my quota to the chorus of approval which ought to salute its general contents.

But I should like to protest, and protest violently, against the unjustified attack on nature-cure, etc., by your contributor, C. Suffern.

I do not know the gentleman either personally or by reputation; but obviously he is allowing his pen to run away with him, and protest from someone with practical experience of the benefits of nature-cure is called-for.

I suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for twenty years, and I leave you to imagine what *that* means to a profes-

it "upon both the side-posts and the upper door-posts of the houses wherein they shall eat it."

The blood, of course, was to be a sign for the Lord as to the houses occupied by Israelites. Are we to assume, then, that without this sign—certainly a most garish one—that the Lord would not have been able to distinguish the dwellings of the Israelites from the dwellings of the Egyptians? It is a curious denial of the omniscience that the Lord is reputed to possess.

Comes, now, the triumphant slaughter.

"And it came to pass at midnight, the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive woman that was in the prison, and all the first-born of cattle.

"And Pharaoh arose in the night, and all his servants, and all Egypt; and there arose a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house wherein there lay not one dead.

"And Pharaoh, calling Moses and Aaron in the night, said, 'Arise, and go forth from my people, you and the children of Israel. Go, sacrifice to the Lord as you say.

"Your sheep and herds, take along with you, as you demanded; and departing, bless me."

But the Israelites wanted very much more than their sheep and their herds.

"They asked of the Egyptians vessels of silver and gold, and very much raiment; and the Lord gave favour to the people in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them. And they stripped the Egyptians."

Here, in this slaying, is the origin of the Passover.

"And this day," reads the Lord's injunction, "shall be for a memorial to you; and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord in your generations with an everlasting observance." Could there be, by the Hebrews, a still-continuing recognition of a more loathsome event?

The descent of Moses is thus related, "And Amram took to wife Jochebed, his aunt by the father's side, and she bore him Aaron and Moses."

I give this, because it rather completes the picture—a picture in which the predominating elements are stupidity, injustice, blood-lust, and incest.

I refrain from further Biblical narrations.

For example, the conversations credited to serpents and asses; or that superlative of idiocies—the representation of God as being so afraid of the people of the earth ascending to heaven through the Tower of Babel that he confounded the tongues of the builders, and thereby we got the diversity of languages that are spoken to-day.

From beginning to end, the ignorance—the crudity and the barbarity—of the Bible is typified in the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.

Nor is it the slightest use, in the way of evasion, to try to differentiate the Old Testament from the New, for the God of the one does not cease with the beginning of the other.

I am confident that in years to come the Bible will be universally derided—derided as magic and witchcraft are derided to-day—and derided with all the greater wonder that a belief in it should have so long persisted.

Belief in the Bible—that it is a God-inspired work, that in it is revealed the origin of the world, and that it discloses the character and wishes of the Creator—is due, first and foremost, to the fact that it is not read. Never mind about the claims made as to the circulation of the Bible. For to read it—and still to profess a belief in it—is to confess oneself to be either a simpleton or an impostor.

Particularly does this remark apply to clerics—in short, to all who trade in the Bible, from the highest to the lowest.

I hope my correspondent in England will realize that I have no desire to take a crutch from those who may need it. What I seek is to lend my help—in my own small way—in dispersing the cloud of superstition that has for so long enveloped the world. Thus will we come to recognize the futility of prayers; more-and-more to develop the spirit of self-reliance; and to endeavour to get what we want solely by wisely-directed human effort.

Briefly, I would, if I could, substitute for the crutch to which some may cling a firm, sane, and helpful footing for the whole of humanity.

FRANK HILL.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

sional musician: I spent fortunes both on orthodox medicines, etc., and (frankly) on patent and quack medicines—neither of which did any lasting good. The complaint got suddenly worse about the beginning of this year, so much so that something had to be done; and having tried both doctors and quacks, I was pretty desperate, until I was advised to try nature-cure. You will observe that, like most of the rest of blinkered humanity, I did not try nature-cure until everything else had failed.

A vegetarian diet, cold bath every morning, tectotalism, and regular manipulation and osteopathy were prescribed and carried out; the result is—EVEN IN A SHORT SIX MONTHS—a cure; and it is a cure that will last so long as I observe reasonable rules of living.

This case is not by any means an isolated one, as I can testify from people I know personally; hence this protest.

HAROLD T.

### FREE SPEECH

SIR,—I was extremely pleased to read the letter from Mr. Carlton in a recent issue, and offer my whole-hearted concurrence with the views expressed. Dictatorship, whether from the Left or Right—Communist or Fascist—is incompatible with Freethought; and real Freethinkers will not be afraid to say so. Only too often have I observed speakers and writers referring in the most explicit terms to our opposition to Fascist dictatorship, but leaving our equal opposition to Communist dictatorship to be inferred from our general principles. A little more honesty and courage would seem to be indicated.

WALTER FLETCHER.

## National Secular Society

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD JULY 15, 1937

THE President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, Bryant, Easterbrook, Preece, Seibert, Ebury, Tuson, Bedborough and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Manchester, North London, West London Branches and the Parent Society. Lecture reports were noted from Messrs. Whitehead, Brighton, Clayton, Shortt, and Mrs. Whitefield. Legal opinion obtained and passed on to Liverpool and Manchester Branches was endorsed. Correspondence from Glasgow, Bradford, North London Branches and Harrow was dealt with. A communication from the Freethinkers' Club and Institute, and a suggested visit to Thomas Paine's house was discussed. A preliminary meeting of the London Committee for inviting the International Congress to London in 1938 was announced.

It was decided to hold the next meeting of the Executive on Thursday, August 19, and the meeting closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,

General Secretary.

## THE FOURTH AGE

By

WILLIAM REPTON.

Price 1s.

Postage 1d.

THE PIONEER PRESS, 61 FARRINGTON STREET, E.C.4.

## 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.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"Sin and Psychology."

#### OUTDOOR

BETHNAL GREEN AND HACKNEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.30, Mr. C. Tuson

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

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 7.0, Sunday, Mrs. E. Grout. Rushcroft Road, near Brixton, 8.0, Tuesday, A Lecture. Cock Pond, Clapham Old Town, 8.0, Friday, Mr. H. Preece.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Corner of Deanery Road, Water Lane, Stratford, E.): 7.0, Mr. Leacy.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes and Evans. 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes, Leacy, Connel! and Tuson. Wednesday, 7.30, Messrs. Bryant and Tuson. Thursday, 7.30, Messrs. Saphin, Bryant, Carlton and Tuson. Friday, 7.30, Messrs. Barnes, Perry and others. The *Freethinker*, *Age of Reason* and Mr. Chapman Cohen's latest pamphlets on sale outside Marble Arch Tube Station every evening.

### COUNTRY

#### OUTDOOR

BLACKBURN MARKET: 7.0, Sunday, Mr. J. Clayton.

BLACKBURN (Market): 8.0, Monday, Mr. J. V. Shortt.

BOLTON ("Steps" if available): 8.0, Thursday, Mr. J. V. Shortt.

BLYTH (The Fountain): 7.0, Monday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

CHESTER-LE-STREET (The Bridge): 8.0, Friday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BURNLEY MARKET: 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. Clayton.

CHORLEY (Market): 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. V. Shortt.

ECCLES (Market Cross): 8.0, Friday, Mr. J. V. Shortt.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Edinburgh): 7.30, Sunday, Grant Street, Greenock, 8.0, Tuesday, Albert Road, Glasgow, 8.0, Wednesday, Albion Street, 8.0, Friday, Muriel Whitefield will speak at each meeting.

HAPTON: 7.30, Monday, Mr. J. Clayton.

HARLE SYKE: 7.30, Friday, Mr. J. Clayton.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Queen's Drive, opposite Walton Baths): 8.0, Sunday, Messrs. Shortt and Jackson. Corner of High Park Street and Park Road, or near vicinity, 8.0, Thursday, Messrs. Parry and Morris.

NORTH ORMESBY (Market Place): 7.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SEYTON DELAVAL (The Avenue): 7.0, Wednesday. A Public discussion on Christianity. For: Mr. A. Robinson. Against: Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Gill Bridge Avenue): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

A NUMBER of Second-hand Freethought books, etc., for Sale, list sent on application to—H. BARRON, 2 Beechfield Terrace, Lancaster.

## Christianity & Civilization

A Chapter from "The History of the Intellectual Development of Europe."

By Prof. J. W. DRAPER.

Price—TWO PENCE.

Postage ½d

THE PIONEER PRESS, 61 FARRINGTON STREET, E.C.4.

# HUMANITY AND WAR

By

CHAPMAN COHEN

Forty pages, with cover. **THREEPENCE**, postage id. extra. This is a Freethinker's view of the whole subject of war, fearlessly and simply expressed. In order to assist in its circulation eight copies will be sent for Two Shillings postage paid. Terms for larger quantities on application.

*Send at once for a Supply*

Issued for the Secular Society, Limited, by the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon St., E.C.4 LONDON

# BRAIN and MIND

— BY —

Dr. ARTHUR LYNCH.

This is an introduction to a scientific psychology along lines on which Dr. Lynch is entitled to speak as an authority. It is a pamphlet which all should read.

Price - 6d.     By post - 7d.

A Great Naturalist and Freethinker

A Naturalist & Immortality

An Essay on W. H. Hudson, by

C-de-B

With artistic cover design

Price 2s.     Postage 2d.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

President - - - CHAPMAN COHEN.

General Secretary - R. H. ROSETTI.

68 FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C. 4

THE National Secular Society was founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh. He remained its President until shortly before his death, and the N.S.S. has never ceased to live up to the tradition of "Thorough" which Bradlaugh by his life so brilliantly exemplified.

The N.S.S. is the only organization of militant Freethinkers in this country. It aims to bring into one body all those who believe the religions of the world to be based on error, and to be a source of injury to the best interests of Society. It claims that all political laws and moral rules should be based upon purely secular considerations. It is without sectarian aims or party affiliations.

If you appreciate the work that Bradlaugh did, if you admire the ideals for which he lived and fought, it is not enough merely to admire. The need for action and combined effort is as great to-day as ever. You can best help by filling up the attached form and joining the Society founded by Bradlaugh.

### PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS.

SECULARISM affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, and that human effort should be wholly directed towards its improvement: it asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

Secularism affirms that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; it affirms that liberty belongs of right to all, and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilized State.

Secularism affirms that morality is social in origin and application, and aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.

Secularism demands the complete secularization of the State, and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organizations it seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of peoples as a means of advancing international peace, to further common cultural interests, and to develop the freedom and dignity of man.

The Funds of the National Secular Society are legally secured by Trust Deed. The Trustees are the President, Treasurer and Secretary of the Society, with two others appointed by the Executive. There is thus the fullest possible guarantee for the proper expenditure of whatever funds the Society has at its disposal.

The following is a quite sufficient form for anyone who desires to benefit the Society by legacy:—

I hereby give and bequeath (*Here insert particulars of legacy*), free of all death duties, to the Trustees of the National Secular Society for all or any of the purposes of the Trust Deed of the said Society.

### MEMBERSHIP

Any person is eligible as a member on signing the following declaration:—

I desire to join the National Secular Society, and I pledge myself, if admitted as a member, to co-operate in promoting its objects.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

Dated this.....day of.....19...

This declaration should be transmitted to the Secretary with a subscription.

P.S.—Beyond a minimum of Two Shillings per year, every member is left to fix his own subscription according to his means and interest in the cause.

*The Book That Shook The Churches*

# The Age Of Reason

THOMAS PAINE

With Critical Introduction by CHAPMAN COHEN

or more than Thirty Years Men and Women went to prison to vindicate the right to publish and circulate this book

This is a complete edition of Paine's immortal work, and covers, with introduction (44 pages), 250 pages of close type, well printed on good paper with portrait cover. Price 4d., postage 2½d., or strongly bound in cloth with portrait on plate paper, 1s. 6d., postage 3d.

This is the cheapest work ever published in the history of the Freethought Movement. No other book ever shook the Churches so thoroughly, and its wide circulation to-day will repeat the effect it produced more than a century ago. It is simple enough for a child and profound enough for a philosopher. Paine's book appealed to the people in 1794; it appeals to the public to-day.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH

### WHAT IS RELIGION?

By

COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL

Price 1d. each.

Postage ¼d.

A list of Ingersoll's pamphlets published by  
The Pioneer Press

<i>About the Holy Bible</i>	- - -	3d.
<i>Oration on Thomas Paine</i>	- - -	2d.
<i>Household of Faith</i>	- - -	1d.
<i>Mistakes of Moses</i>	- - -	2d.
<i>Rome or Reason?</i>	- - -	3d.
<i>The Christian Religion</i>	- - -	2d.
<i>What is it Worth?</i>	- - -	1d.

The above will be sent post free 1s. 6d.

A New Propagandist Series  
by CHAPMAN COHEN

## PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

- No. 1. Did Jesus Christ Exist?  
2. Morality Without God  
3. What is the Use of Prayer?  
4. Christianity and Woman  
5. Must we Have a Religion?  
6. The Devil  
7. What is Freethought?  
8. Gods and Their Makers

OTHERS IN PREPARATION

Each Pamphlet contains Sixteen  
Pages

Price 1d.

Postage ½d.