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Views and Opinions

The Age of Reason

HERE is a passage from the *New English Weekly* of July 15, which, for several reasons, is worth noting:—

For the remarkable price of fourpence one can buy Paine's famous work, reprinted with a good biographical introduction by Mr. Chapman Cohen. Mr. Cohen tells us that the *Age of Reason* is still a best seller. It would be interesting to know why. The book has some value as a historical curiosity for students, but students don't make a best seller, and one wonders who its other readers are. Paine's style is unattractive, and at this time of day his attacks on the Bible can hardly interest anyone except a conscientious Fundamentalist, grimly bent on hearing both sides of the case. No doubt the perennial popularity of hot-gospelling has something to do with it, for Paine is, precisely, a hot-gospeller. Even so one would expect people to prefer something a little more up-to-date.

I will be charitable and assume that the writer of the above paragraph has but a very slight acquaintance with Paine's writings, knows but little of the enormous influence exercised by Paine, and of the high opinion formed of his literary style by those well able to judge and who know good writing when they see it. I will merely submit two considerations for his attention. First, Paine's writings won for their style the admiration of men like Blake and Shelley, Hazlitt and Walter Savage Landor, Burke and the Rolands, with a large number of others who knew what good writing should be; and the best of his theological and political contemporaries paid tribute to the quality of Paine's writing. Putting on one side Swift and Defoe, and there was with them marked differences from Paine, I do not know anyone who pursued the same method of direct, simple, and expressive English with so great a literary effect. Paine may almost be said to have created a new form of controversial writing, and considered from the standpoint of purpose it has never been surpassed.

But something more than either valuable ideas or charm of composition must exist if a man's writings

are to live for generations after he is dead. To secure perpetuity there must be a combination of charm of style and value of ideas expressed. Time, as old Sir Thomas Browne said, "doth antiquate antiquity," but while time has not antiquated Paine's essential ideas, it was the marriage of these with simple beauty of expression that has saved Paine from being buried under the mountains of calumny that religious and political hatred heaped upon him. When Paine in his *Common Sense*, and in his series of *Crisis* papers put new spirit into the retreating and beaten American troops, and enabled them to force back the British army; when in England the *Rights of Man* and the *Age of Reason*, flamed through the country, and for more than a generation formed a rallying point for reformers in Church and State, and inspired the greatest fight for freedom of thought that the nineteenth century witnessed; it was not because of the mere expression of revolutionary ideas, or an appeal to mere emotion such as has often been witnessed in the history of religion. The central fact was that Paine brought to his task that rare combination of feeling and intellect which, while they are always two sides of the same thing, was a case of feeling directed by intellect, and not intellect, acting under the domination of an unreasoning impulse. What Conway said of the *Age of Reason* is true of all the principle writings of Paine. They were not mere books; they were a man's heart. At a distance of nearly a century and a half they are still that—the cry of a MAN pleading for the dignity of men, and the elevation of humanity. Paine lives because sympathy with wrong and the detestation of tyranny, spiritual and material, find in him one of its most eloquent and forceful voices.

* * *

The Oracles of God

So far as the *Age of Reason* is concerned there is a very cogent reason why no other book exists to-day that can take its place. This is that the work it did when it was first published, it is doing to-day. The same type of Bible-believer exists now that existed at the opening of the nineteenth century; and the Bible is still used to bolster crude superstition and social wrong as it was used in 1794. Consider; there are millions of people in the English-speaking world who still accept the Bible as a revelation from God. Many, many millions have outgrown this and say so. But there are multitudes, and many of these in high places, who use this belief to keep alive a vague and dangerous conviction that in some way the Bible is generally different from other books. The Bible still occupies a favoured position in our schools, and our youth leaves them with a vague notion that the Bible is not to be questioned. It is still in use in courts of law, and in Parliament where men call upon the great Mumbo-jumbo, in the true manner of the fetish-worshipping savage, to help them act honestly. The Bible is the basis of sabbatarian laws and of our blas-

phemy laws. It is still a fetish-book, even though its fetishistic powers are not now so clearly defined.

Only the other day, at the coronation of George VI. the Archbishop of Canterbury handed a "great Bible" to the King with these words:—

We present you with this book, the most valuable that this world affords. Here is wisdom; here is the royal Law, these are the lively oracles of God.

"The most valuable" in the world! "the royal Law"! "the lively oracles of God"! There is not one of these statements that, if we are to take them in their plain meaning, the Archbishop does not know is a demonstrated lie. Is it the science of the Bible that is unquestionable, or its ethical teaching that is impeccable, or its history that is beyond doubt? Is it the teaching of "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and its demonism; is it the subjection of women, the teaching of passive obedience, the teaching of salvation by grace, and of hell-fire, that make it the most valuable book in the world? Or is it not the demonstrated truth that the Bible is a collection of early mythological customs, of dubious ethics, of unreliable history, and is responsible for some of the blackest pages in our history? But it is not for nothing that the Archbishop mouths this calculated lie concerning the Bible, and the King (we having conveniently got rid of another King who had some doubts on this matter) passively accepts it. Somehow or the other the *feeling*, if not the conviction, about the Bible must be kept alive. Children must be misled, and adults must be kept unaware of the truth about the Bible, and frank criticism of the Bible must be either suppressed or kept down as much as possible; and even a writer in a weekly review must repeat the stupid statement that *The Age of Reason* is out of date. If the exploitation of the public purse by the Christian Church, if the presence of Bishops in the House of Lords, if the maintenance of laws based directly on Bible Teaching, do not prove that people are in need of the *Age of Reason*, what do these things prove? If our reviewer believes that the Bible is really the Oracles of God, and that it is the most valuable book in the world, then he is a disproof of his own statement. He is one of those to whom the *Age of Reason* is specially addressed.

* * *

An Immortal Work

And this brings me to the fundamental reason why the *Age of Reason* is necessary, and explains why it is doing the same work to-day that it has done since 1794. The prevalence of sabbatarianism, the belief in the second coming of Christ, the existence of a Bench of Bishops in Parliament, the use of the Bible in the Schools, all these things serve as evidence of the existence of a large section of the population that is still where the bulk of believers was when Paine wrote. It is true there are millions of Christians who have, thanks to Paine, got beyond this primitive stage of Bible worship. But this merely adds humbug, hypocrisy and insincerity to the situation. From the Archbishop of Canterbury downward, when these people profess a belief in the Bible they have a "reserved" meaning for the terms they use. They *mean* one thing; they aim at being understood in another. In the press they speak with one voice, in the pulpit with another. In apologetic articles they admit the non-historicity of many Bible stories, the unscientific character of the Bible account of the world and of human origins. But in the pulpit they refer to Bible incidents and teachings as though their accuracy had never been questioned. So we have on the one side a mass of ignorance concerning the Bible, on the other a conspiracy of silence, and a lesson of deliberate misdirection. Somehow or the

other the general belief that the Bible is apart from other books and is still the "oracles of God" must be preserved.

It is the mass of genuine believers that holds the key to the situation. Convert them to a knowledge of the truth, and the battle is half-won. The incentive to profit from the ignorance of the simple Bible-worshippers can operate no longer. And for the conversion of this Bible-ridden class I do not hesitate to say there is no other book that can equal the *Age of Reason*. A modern Freethinker, fully acquainted with the results of modern Biblical criticism, including a full knowledge of anthropology, finds it almost impossible to get into touch with the mentality of the Bible-worshipper. He finds often enough he is talking a language which his hearer simply does not understand. He speaks plainly and he is accused of flippancy because he cannot face a ridiculous position with becoming gravity. But *The Age of Reason* was written by a man who had once believed in the Bible, and at a time when Bible believers did, for the larger part, believe in the Bible of history. Paine, therefore, brings to his subject an atmosphere in which the present-day Bibliolator moves. His book was written at a time when people accepted the Bible in the sense that the Archbishop (although he knows better) spoke of it to the King, who appeared to receive it (although he must know better) in the sense in which it was offered. Paine was able to argue against Bible absurdities with a gravity that no convinced and educated Freethinker could do to-day. Combative Freethought moves to-day on a higher level, naturally, than it did in Paine's day. Of course, Paine's book is not up to date. It is that which gives it its great value. It takes the Bible as the "oracles of God," and examines their worth and reliability, and it does this with shattering effect. The people who have advanced further along the line of development, and who wish to have "something a little more up-to-date" can find a multitude of books with which to gratify their taste. But for the man who is still in the grip of a genuine Christian belief in the Bible, there is no better work than *The Age of Reason*.

Our Aim

* * *

So I had several considerations in mind when I issued the *Age of Reason*, at what the reviewer truly calls "the remarkable price of fourpence." First, it enabled those who had merely heard of Paine to taste his quality, and if they had any sense of good writing they would be pleased with the reading. Second, it enabled those who knew, to compare the state of "advanced" Christian opinion concerning the Bible with the position when Paine entered the arena, and, then, if they knew the story of the Freethought fight, they would be able to estimate the influence the *Age of Reason* exerted in forcing Christian leaders to admit as much of the truth as became compulsory. And no devoted mother has ever watched the decline of a loved child with greater anguish than have the leaders of the Christian Church watched the growth of a knowledge of truth concerning their "oracles of God." And, third, its publication enabled those who cared to carry on a quiet propaganda "on their own" to do so with but little outlay. *The Age of Reason* has never ceased to act as a liberative force, it is still so acting, and it will continue so to act while the Christian Church exists. We cannot make Christian leaders intellectually honest. But we can at least make some of their dupes realize that their leaders really ought to tell the truth so far as they know it. The new edition of the *Age of Reason* has had a great sale, and the printing, calculated to last four years, seems almost certain to promise exhaustion in one. It was, of course, published at a loss, but I am

quite certain that its wide distribution and rapid sale have been good propaganda. I am so convinced of that that I would have issued the book at a lower price still had it been possible. But the publication of this cheap edition is only part of a larger ambition to issue other Freethought classics at an equally low price. It is a question of funds, and I must "possess my soul in patience." But it is quite plain that Paine still lives. One of the greatest Englishmen and humanitarians of his day is still carrying on that work of emancipation to which he gave himself while living.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Consecrated Charlatans

THERE are about forty thousand men, each bearing the title of "reverend," who form a special caste apart from their fellow-men. Who are they? And what do they do specially to entitle them to be revered? In what particular way are they superior to other men who are simple "misters"? These are very pertinent questions which, in this twentieth century, are worth the serious consideration of democratic minds.

It may be contended that this reverence is paid to these men because they have chosen as their business the supervision and direction of the religious habits of the English people. In reality they are medicine-men engaged in precisely similar work to their dark-skinned prototypes in barbarian countries. They tell us of "gods" who get angry with us; of a dreadful "devil" who must be guarded against; of "angels" who fly from heaven to earth; or saints who can assist if supplicated. Nearly forty thousand men are engaged in this sorry business. This happens in England alone. If we include the European countries and America, from north to south, there are hundreds of thousands of them, maintained at a cost of hundreds of millions of money yearly. And their ambiguous profession is no more honest than fortune-telling. Many a poor old woman has been actually sent to prison for taking a shilling or so from a servant-girl after promising her a handsome husband and four children; but these ministers are allowed to take large sums of money for promises of good fortune in "the beautiful land above."

Everyone knows that the average "reverend" enjoys a comfortable livelihood, and lives in a nice house, often larger than his neighbours'. He has just as much, or as little, work as he likes to do, and if he likes to spend three-fourths of each day reading or visiting, there is no one to say him nay. He can count on invitations to dinner and other hospitality all the year round, which is no small saving in the household expenses. He has lengthy holidays in the summer months. The higher ecclesiastics butter their bread far more heavily. Forty archbishops and bishops share £182,700 yearly, with palaces, palatial residence, and town-houses, thrown in. The bachelor Bishop of London, who is always complaining of the dreadful poverty of the wretched clergy, enjoys a salary of £200 weekly, a sum sufficient to keep forty working-class families in comfort.

Seeing that little merit attaches to the priestly profession, are we to assume that reverence is due to the exemplary lives led by this very favoured class of the community? Divorce Court proceedings and Police Court records show that the priestly character in no way differs from any other class of the community. They may retort that there are black sheep in every fold. True, but doctors, solicitors, tradesmen, workmen, and others, do not pretend to being a sacred caste, or a class apart. They do not ask to be known

as "reverend," or reverse their collars as a badge of sanctity. It is because the ministers of the so-called Church of England and Free Churches expect people to look up to them that we compare their behaviour with their boastings. When they come down from their sacred pedestals we will make the same allowance for them that we make for tinkers and tailors.

It appears, also, that these clergymen are many of them gross perjurers. They subscribe to the "Thirty-nine Articles of Religion." These precious articles include the pretty conceit that Christ went down bodily to "hell"; that a spirit can be at the same time a father and a son, and also proceed from itself as a ghost; that Adam was the father of us all, and that he ate fruit, in consequence of which all are damned; that Roman Catholic doctrine is a vain invention; that the Christian Bible is the word of God; and that the monarch is the head of the Church. To these Articles of Faith, among others, every Church of England priest subscribes. And we know also that numbers do not believe in them, or observe them, and that their main reason for remaining in this Church is that it provides an easy and comfortable living. And the right to appoint priests to benefices is sold in the open market, as if it were so much coal, or a load of strawberries.

What has all this Feudalism and barbaric nonsense to do with the twentieth century? And what right have these religious cave-men to sit any longer as legislators in the House of Lords? The Votes of the bishops in the Upper House are sufficient to rouse the lasting enmity of all Democrats, for they show how hopelessly this particular Church is out of touch with modern thought and progress. The bishops have been defenders of absolutism, slavery, and the blood-thirsty penal code. They were the resolute opponents of every political and social reform. And if they repeat the exhibition they made over the recent Divorce Bill, the demand for disestablishment and disendowment will be heard in quarters where it is least expected, and will shake some vested interests, such as the Bench of Bishops, with unwonted trepidation. These consecrated charlatans had better take heed, for assuredly their Church will not long survive such a display of Medievalism and obscurantism.

Few worse misfortunes can befall any people than this of possessing a powerful, utterly selfish, and retrograde caste in its very midst that saps the very spring of morality, that encourages mental confusion, and that constantly, and of set design, hinders the wheels of progress. The word "reverend" in this connexion is pure, unadulterated humbug. To apply it to the common curate, or to the purse-proud prelate, is as absurd as to apply the term "Majesty" to a swathed mummy among the relics of Ancient Egypt in the British Museum.

MIMNERMUS.

The ideas of God, and of a double, which escaped the body at death, were born in the cowering ignorance of primitive mankind. Whether the Joss worshipped be called Mumbo-Jumbo or Jahveh makes no real difference. Both have the same origin, and the claim of one to actuality is no greater than the claim of the other. When a Christian bishop prays to his deity for rain or for fine weather, for victory in war, or for peace in some industrial dispute, is there anyone who can point to the slightest difference between him and the primitive medicine-man praying to his deity for much the same kind of things? Is the one Joss really more effective than the other? I agree with the bishop that there is only one God. But he assumes many forms, and whatever he be called, and in whatever language he be addressed, it is the same thing—the thing that was born in fear, fashioned in ignorance, and which fear and ignorance and cupidity have kept in being.—Chapman Cohen, "God and Evolution."

Catholicism and Modern Fiction

SOME time ago, dealing with one of the sporadic outbursts of Bishops against modern fiction, I pointed out the testimony which that fiction bears to the slackening of the religious grip. Not only is there the enormous negative evidence of an extensive popular literature which simply ignores religion although avowedly dealing with people in their everyday life and all its interests and influences; there is also a growing vein of contempt for religion, an explicit attack on the churches for their corrupting social effect.

An author who is, I think, not enough appreciated by Rationalists and Freethinkers is Norman Douglas. His work, though limited in some ways, was of great importance as a liberating influence in the immediate post-war years. And his novel *South Wind* is certainly secure of its place as the generating force behind the whole post-war "sophisticated" school. It is vastly superior to its offshoots; the expression of a genial humanist disturbed into a position of subtle irony. This attitude became brittle and devitalized in the imitators of Douglas; but in Douglas's own hands there is a redeeming undercurrent of strong bitterness against the despoilers of the world, all the forces of reaction and irrationality. His imitators caught his mannerism of sardonic indifference and aloofness; they lacked the undertone of fierce indignation, of partisanship for humanism.

His travel-sketches in *Old Calabria* and *Siren Land* have also an enduring value for the picture they give of his personality, so full of that massive humanist eccentricity that endears the great Victorians to us, yet at the same time orientated towards the new world of deeper questionings. They also give a picture of the pre-Fascist Italy, which is interesting to read in the light of later events; no Englishman has known better than Douglas the peasant of South Italy.

As part of his picture of the Italian peasant he gives a ruthlessly exact account of the part that the Catholic priest has always played in keeping Italy as close as possible to barbarism. The following passages from *Old Calabria* will be of interest to Freethinkers, and may serve as typical of Douglas's attitude to Christianity:—

The scandals that occasionally arise in connexion with that saintly institution, the Foundling Hospital at Naples, are enough to make humanity shudder. Of 856 children living under its motherly care during 1895, 853 "died" in the course of that one year—only three survived; a wholesale massacre. These 853 murdered children were carried forward in the books as still living, and the institution, which had a yearly revenue of over 600,000 francs, was debited with their maintenance, while 42 doctors (instead of the prescribed number of 19) continued to draw salaries for their services to these innocents that had meanwhile been starved and tortured to death. The official report on these horrors ends with the words: "There is no reason to think that these facts are peculiar to the year 1895."

And speaking of archives destroyed by the corsairs, he goes on:—

In this particular branch, again, the Christian surpassed the unbeliever. More archives were destroyed in the so-called Age of Lead—the closing period of Bourbonism—than under Saracens and Corsairs combined. It was quite the regular thing to sell them as waste-paper to the shop-keepers. Some of them escaped this fate by the veriest miracle. . . .

Comparing the lot of Arab and Christian slaves, he says:—

We have not much testimony as to whether these Arab slaves enjoyed their lot in European countries; but many of the Christians in Algiers certainly enjoyed theirs. A considerable number of them refused to profit by Lord Exmouth's arrangement for their ransom. I myself knew the descendant of a man who had been thus sent back to his relations from captivity, and who soon enough returned to Africa, declaring that the climate and religion of Europe were alike insupportable.

These passages will suffice to show that Douglas is one of the English writers, very scarce in his generation, who never hesitated to speak outright when faced with the dirty work of religion. There is no excuse now for anyone interested in English literature being ignorant of his masterpiece *South Wind*, for it is obtainable in the sixpenny Penguin Library.

If I were asked to pick out the younger writers of English fiction whose novels are most likely to survive, I should pick Ralph Bates and James Hanley. I have already, in the *Freethinker*, mentioned *The Olive Field*, by Bates, a wonderfully rich picture of revolutionary Spain, in which the reactionary role of the Catholic Church is fully depicted. Curiously enough, in the major part of Hanley's work the social influence of the Catholic Church is also a central theme. But Hanley deals, not with Southern Europe, but with Irish families in Liverpool. Not indeed that the Catholic strain is explicitly emphasized in his novels that deal with the Fury family (*The Furies* and *The Secret Journey*), yet it is importantly there. The Catholic influence of the priest pervades the lives of the Furies, and is implicitly shown as an essential part of the environment crushing Mrs. Fury and all her family-ambitions and social hopes.

Why these novels of Hanley are great is that they depict, as no other work has succeeded in doing, the life of a proletarian family. In many ways it is a strange family, yet the total effect is one of extreme typicality; and this typicality is in no way affected by the fact that the family is so intensely and obviously a Roman Catholic one. Perhaps the reason is that in these days, when even the Methodists are so much a watered-down force, it is only in the case of the Catholics that the stupefying and destructive effect of a pervasive religious outlook can be adequately shown. There is no doubt that the various Protestant creeds sweat their hardest in the service of Capitalist ideology, and their evil intent and power must not be underrated. Yet it is in the Catholic Church that we see the religious influence most entire and reactionary. That Church, in its alliance with Fascism and the Feudalist remnants, is a ceaselessly active enemy. It alone of the Churches is capable of directly fomenting armed reaction, as it has in Spain. We can easily imagine the Archbishop of Canterbury, or for that matter the lights of Methodism, hurrying along to bless a successful Fascist coup in England as a "regenerating" revival of "spiritual" forces; but we cannot imagine them actually plotting such a coup.

The Fury novels, then, besides being remarkable works of art with an extraordinarily delicate and powerful definition of lower-class life, are of peculiar interest in showing the way that Roman Catholicism leaves its crushing stamp on its proletarian flock. Their significance is to be found in the deep typicality of their definition, which would be incomplete without the relation of the priest to Mrs. Fury and her baffled life.

I will finish off this note by referring to a short story, *The Heretic*, by Fred Urquhart (in the third volume of *New Writing*, edited by John Lehmann, a series which no one interested in progressive writing can afford to ignore). This short story makes ex-

licit what is implicit in Hanley's huge epic narrative. It deals with the fate of a Roman Catholic lad who tries to reject his faith. Not a lad of the upper-classes, who can simplify such matters by merely going off somewhere else into a new environment, but a lad of the working-class who has no such easy escape. Urquhart shows how relentlessly such a "heretic" is ringed round, how surely the priests can use their social influence to crush and conquer. Here again one is impressed by the greatly superior technique of the Roman Church in such matters. There can be no doubt that as the moral and social issues confronting our generation deepen, the Catholic Church is going to be one of the greatest forces fighting against progress. It is a sin for a Catholic, for instance, to belong to the Left Book Club! So thorough is that Church in all its details that the others do indeed seem amateurs at its side, despite their long traditions of suppression and reaction.

A couple of days after writing the above, it was made topical by one of the priestly outbursts to which I refer. This time it was the President of the Methodist Conference, the Rev. Dr. Robert Bond, who correctly declared, "Novelists for the most part are without a religious background, and some of them write as if religion had no part in life at all."

JACK LINDSAY.

The Christian Guide Book

A "WAYSIDE PULPIT" poster on a church board, recently informed the passers-by that "many people miss the best road in life, because they do not read the Guide book." In our journey through life, seeing that we only pass this way once, some kind of guidance is necessary, if only for the purpose of preventing us making the mistakes that others have made on the route. But the simile of a guide-book, applied to the Bible, is not only misleading, but mischievous in its results. The confusion that it has produced in the Christian world of to-day, shows that such a claim is utterly fallacious. The literature within its pages is largely concerned with the history of the Jews, but imagination seems to play such a large part in the compilation of the records, as to make them, to say the least, untrustworthy.

Many readers will be acquainted with Dr. Brewer's *Guide to English History*, which is an epitome of the reigns of its monarchs, the principal events that occurred, and the famous men who lived during each period. The two books of Kings, and of the Chronicles, also deal summarily with the various Kings who sat upon the thrones of Israel and Judah. Who the writers or copyists of these books were, no one knows, but the records that have come down to us—records for which inspiration is claimed—are in a hopelessly muddled condition. We will take two instances out of several hundred. In 2 Chron. xxi. 20, it is said that Jehoram, when he ascended the throne of Judah, was thirty-two years of age, and that he reigned in Jerusalem eight years—making him at the time of his death, forty years of age. He was immediately succeeded by his youngest son, Ahaziah, who had already reached the age of forty-two (2 Chron. xxii. 2), which makes him two years older than his father. The "Westminster Confession" teaches that the Son, in the combination of the Trinity, is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father; but the Hebrew scribe goes one

better, and makes this son two years older than the father who begat him. Aga, the writer of the "Kings," says that Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots. But the writer of the "Chronicles," evidently not being able to swallow such a large number, reduces the 40,000 to 4,000; which the Oxford and Cambridge theological text-book for "Kings," says, "appears more probable." And it may be that some future Archæologist working in Palestine, will suggest that the number be further reduced to 400, or perhaps 40, as "being more probable." That these Hebrew writers, especially in the matter of figures, allowed their imagination to run riot is further evidenced by their record of the sacrificial slaughter at the dedication of Solomon's temple. It is said (1 Kings viii. 63), that he "offered unto the Lord" 22,000 oxen, and 120,000 sheep. Let anyone try to realize the magnitude of such a slaughter. It would take the pen of an Upton Sinclair to depict adequately the bloody shambles of such a scene.

But perhaps the most effective argument that one can urge against taking the Bible as a guide-book, is to be found in the divided state of Christendom at the present time. The fact that believers are split up into some three hundred different sects, all professing to find a warrant for their various beliefs and practices in the same Bible, is sufficient evidence of its shortcomings as an authoritative Guide. There does not appear to be a single article of faith upon which all Christians are agreed. The very nature of Jesus Christ is a matter of bitter dispute among them. Some profess to believe in his Divinity; others maintain that he was only human; while others allege that he never existed at all, and that the stories of the Nativity and of his infancy are all taken from the older religion of Mithraism. The early Christians were led by St. Paul to expect the speedy return of Jesus Christ in their day, but nearly two thousand years have passed, and the doctrine of his Second Coming is now treated by many earnest believers with an indulgent smile. Some of the smaller sects are still listening for that "midnight cry," when they will be called up to meet him in the air, and taken to dwell with him for ever in those mansions in the sky. While some are lukewarm, and others enthusiastic in their hopes of heaven, there are some who repudiate the notion of such a future home. I have before me a leaflet published under the auspices of the Christadelphian Church, which says:—

The Bible offers no far-off heaven to men, but the habitation of the earth, their natural home, for which they are best fitted.

In this earthly habitation there is, of course, to be no mere war, unemployment, or famine, but people shall live at peace with each other "in their own homes and gardens." Probably some of the songs they will sing in that after-life on earth, to entertain each other and relieve the monotony of existence, will be, "Come into the garden Maud," or "Over the garden wall." This materialistic notion of heaven, seems to correspond with that of the Spiritualists, who also accept the Bible as their guide; but their future abode is neither on earth nor in heaven, but on "the other side." Then there is another place, erected by the Catholic Church, called Purgatory, but it has none of those homely attractions offered by the Christadelphians or the Spiritualists. Indeed when you once arrive there, it takes a lot of prayers mumbled by a priest, and a lot of cash from your surviving friends to get you out.

The initiatory rite of baptism is also a matter of dispute in the Christian Churches. Some believe that it is only rightly administered in the form of total immersion, when the person has reached an age when

¹ *South Wind* (Penguin Lib., 6d.); *Old Calabria and Siren Land* (Secker, 3s. 6d. each); *The Furies and The Secret Journey* (Chatto and Windus); *New Writing*, Spring, 1937, Third Series (Lawrence and Wishart, 6/.)

he can understand its significance; others again, believe in infant sprinkling, on the principle, I suppose, of catching them when they are young. The Catholic press was recently lamenting that the thousands of Basque refugee children, for whose religious future they were very much perturbed, should in their infancy have not all been baptized into Catholicism.

On the question of recreative amusements the Church authorities are sorely perplexed, as the increased facilities for enjoyment are making serious inroads upon Church attendance, and the number of Sunday school scholars. But the Church is only paying the penalty for its long suppression of these legitimate human instincts. Its opposition to the theatre in an earlier age is a matter of history; but it lost in the end. About the only concession that the churches made to such an aspiration, was a Sunday school trip in a farmer's hay-cart to the field of some other distant farmer, kindly lent for the occasion. If they had only studied the animal kingdom, they would have realized how ineradicable is the desire for some kind of diversion. And for the want of biblical guidance on the matter they blundered. And so it is on other matters of social import—the liquor question, marriage and divorce, economic questions, war and peace, etc.—they are all at sea with regard to the methods of their solution; and this Guide Book doesn't help them any.

Of course, in the Catholic Church, the Bible does not occupy the important position that it is supposed to do in the Protestant world. To the Catholic the Church is the Faith, and her interpretation is binding upon all true believers. But the same is becoming, to a large extent, true not only of the Anglican, but of the principal Protestant sects as well. Many readers have doubtless noticed the studiously careful wording of the recent appeal for a "Recall to Religion"—a vague nebulous term that may mean anything or nothing. To have called it a "Recall to Christianity," or primitive "Bible teaching," would probably have resulted in calling public attention to the irreconcilable differences that exist in the Christian world. They are leaving the boosting of the good old book to newspaper writers and Wayside Pulpiters. Apropos of this, there was a special article recently in a Northern evening paper, to which great prominence was given, eulogizing the Bible; alleging that it was still the "best seller," and that its annual production exceeded by far any of the ephemeral literature turned out by the Press. This writer after putting forth his best efforts, admitted at the close of his article, that it was a much neglected book and very little read. Some time later, another regular writer to the paper, who contributes a series of daily notes and comments had some interesting remarks on a Library Record for 1936, which had been sent to him. "With the best wish in the world," he wrote, "to believe the reports one sees now and again, that 'the public is turning more and more from frivolous literature to works of philosophy and religion,' no statistics which reach me from Municipal libraries in any way support the pious expression." An analysis of the issues showed that novels were called for 237,470 times, and works of religion, the lowest of all, are given as 1,720 times. He went on to say: "This did not surprise me, because I never accepted the stories of the growing demand for sound religious teaching." All which goes to show, what lovely pious liars these Bible boosters are.

JOSEPH BRUCE.

No story is more painful than the persecutions of witches, and nowhere was it more atrocious than in England and Scotland. I mention it because it was the direct result of theological doctrines.—*Professor Bury, "A Short History of Freedom of Thought."*

Flogging a Dead Horse

By attacking the Bible and Christianity, Freethinkers are frequently accused of "flogging a dead horse": but the trouble with this horse is not even that he is dead and won't lie down, but that he is not buried, and the stink of his dead carcasses still assails the nostrils of all intelligent people.

Those people who glibly tell us that the Church to-day is a social and philanthropic organization, and exerts very little influence on the lives of ordinary men and women, must be going through life with their eyes shut.

Take for instance the abdication of King Edward VIII, and the part played by the Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the State Church, ably backed by his Nonconformist brethren and supported by politicians who realized that it was bad policy to oppose in any way the Christian vote! On the subject of "Edward," the churches can truthfully sing: "We are not divided, all one body we," and they will probably also have the damned cheek to finish the verse by bellowing: "One in hope and doctrine, one in charity."

But it affects the life of the ordinary citizen very little whoever is King of England: a much more glaring example of church interference is afforded by the Divorce Bill. This measure, introduced by Holford Knight and A. P. Herbert, proposed to give English men and women the same privileges of obtaining redress from unhappy marriages as they are able to get in other parts of the British Empire—Australia and New Zealand for instance.

By the time the churches have criticized, interfered and pruned; by the time the House of Lords, backed by the Bishops, as usual on the side of reaction, has finished with this measure, the Bill will simply be an emasculated edition of the original; thousands of men and women will be compelled to drag out miserable existences because the same type of mind which opposed the introduction of chloroform as being contrary to Christian doctrine, will see to it that any attempt towards a broader and freer life is ruthlessly vetoed; and the great mass of the people, instead of booting out these clericals who are blocking up the gangway to progress, will read solemnly the opinions of parsons, and Roman Catholic priests who are themselves pledged to celibacy.

Where the church is still stronger, as in Ireland, we see that under de Valera's new constitution in the Free State, divorce is to be abolished.

People who tell us that the work of such societies as the National Secular Society is not needed, do not know that, again and again, wretched little newsagents are afraid to display the *Freethinker* on their counters, because parsons have told them repeatedly that if they do, they will not only withdraw their own custom, but threaten to influence their parishioners to do the same. Leather-lunged Salvation Army ignoramuses with their gospel of blood and fire, will make the air hideous with their discordant bellowing, supported by blaring brass bands: while the police indulgently look on; and rest or peace become an impossibility for people in nearby neighbourhoods.

Over and over again the police authorities have moved on Freethought speakers without any authority to do so, and have only ceased their persecution on finding that these speakers have behind them some powerful force such as the National Secular Society, which was prepared to take up the challenge and vindicate the right of free speech.

We read, the other day, in one of the evening papers that the inhabitants of Marks Cross in Sussex, were complaining of the censorship of the books in the village library by the vicar and his wife: and such cases could be multiplied ad infinitum. The vicar's answer is typical of his "cloth." He said: "It is not a question of censorship, it is a question of decency; some modern books are quite alright; those about travel and those about Sussex, but others should not be available."

I suppose the same vicar would indignantly repudiate the statement that the Bible contains about as many indecent passages as any book published. Illustrating this, a man recently told me quite solemnly, a lovely story: His mother gave her small grandson a present of a Bible on his birthday, and the father caught his young

son reading some indecent passages from it to his sister. He was very angry, and when he had finished with the boy, the latter found it more convenient to take his meals off the mantelpiece for a few days. Now if anybody's posterior required warming, it was that of the grandmother who had given the boy the book which contained passages not fit for any youngster to read.

The great trouble with us Freethinkers is that when we reject the falsity and absurdity of religion, we just sit back and smile or wonder at the fuss Christians make in trying to save their wretched little souls; and we let it go at that. Many of us fail to realize that the fight for Freethought is just as necessary as, and even more vital than, it ever has been. If the *Freethinker* had a circulation of 100,000 copies a week, what a force it could and would be in the land! When one thinks that its price is exactly half that of a small packet of cigarettes, and that if every one of its readers made a determined effort to rope in one extra subscriber, we should not only be doing the new subscriber a real good turn, but helping Freethought enormously.

The Church always has been and always will be one of man's greatest foe to progress: that the Churches are less brutal than they were, is not due to any softening of heart, but solely to the efforts of brave men and women, known and unknown, who have kept the Freethought banner flying throughout the ages.

Some years before the war, when Germany still retained a certain measure of freedom and culture, one of the German papers published a cartoon of two priests looking at some of the instruments of the Inquisition. One of them remarked, "What a pity we cannot use these now; the faith would be much stronger if we could."

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

Acid Drops

Mr. Herbert's Matrimonial Bill, a very poor thing compared with what it ought to have been, is now law. The Archbishop of Canterbury, who, as a layman confessed his sympathy with the measure, as a Christian priest found himself in opposition—and voted against it. The priest was once more in opposition to the citizen, and so furnishes one more example of the way in which religion will distort a man's judgment, and place the interests of his Church in the front. We do not see that the Archbishop, as an Archbishop, could have done anything else. It is his Church that, in this country, has always opposed any reasonable reform of the marriage laws; it is his Church that has, as its basis, a conception of marriage that can see little more in it than a sanctified fornication, and to place a consideration of marriage upon a social and reasonable basis, is only one more step towards the complete secularization of conduct.

The *Times* says that the success of the Bill is due to the distinction drawn between the Christian conception of marriage and the provision which "the State is compelled to make for marriages which have not attained that ideal, and founded." On that we make two comments. The first is that it is pure humbuggery. It assumes the "Christian ideal" is the higher and that is simply not true. The Christian for a large part of its history, has taught, as a large section still teaches, the superiority of the celibate life. It is in St. Paul's obscene reason for permitting marriage, and is implied in the Church of England marriage service. The family as a whole plays a very poor part in Christian ecclesiastical history. Its preference for keeping two people tied together for life, although in a real, and higher sense their marriage has long since ceased to exist, is a final proof of the low view taken by the Church of both marriage and the family.

Our second comment is, that the Church of England is part of the State. It was created by the State; its income is largely derived from the State; and for the purposes of marriage a Church of England minister is of no other and no higher rank than an ordinary Registrar of

marriages. If therefore, a Church of England minister cannot carry out the law of marriage as laid down by the State his proper course would be to resign. For a priest to take his salary, as a servant of the State, and then to refuse to discharge the duties for which he is paid, is sheer dishonesty. But honesty seldom plays a predominating part where religion is concerned. The fact that things are as they are is an example of the way to which the Government truckles to the most stupid of religious prejudices.

Ten unpaid Moslem missionaries are now working for the conversion of England, and a number of Englishwomen have been converted. Mr. A. R. Dard, the Imam of the London Mosque, says this is because woman finds much more real freedom in Mohammedanism than she does in Christianity. But there is a snag in this. The claim is qualified by the remark that "up-to-date Moslems believe in the education of women." But one might add that up-to-date Moslems are much like up-to-date Christians—any advanced idea they hold is at once put to the credit of their religion. But, as a matter of fact, the education of women in modern Islam is a product of Freethought, and the leaders of the movement avowed Freethinkers. Taken alone, and unaffected by non-religious influences, Islam is much like other religions, stagnatory and retrogressive, although there were liberal elements associated with Islam from the outset, and it has to its credit a tradition of culture which the Christian Church, by itself, has not.

Buddhism is also making strenuous efforts to convert England, and claims that 150 converts have recently been made. Funds are being raised to build a Buddhist temple in London. Buddhism, as Buddha left it, is not a religion at all, but an atheistic philosophy which has become adulterated with a deal of superstition, but it is not its philosophy that will be advertised. Still, it may do Christians some good since Buddhism is the one system which is called a religion by many, that has no teaching of intolerance and has no persecution to its credit. Hindooism is likewise on the war-path, and is impressing upon English people its doctrine of incarnation and the monkish life. Mormons are also lending a hand at this effort to capture England. They have 200 missionaries at work, and claim seven hundred converts. Mormonism is a form of religion that the great Sir Richard Burton placed higher than Christianity.

We confess to an interested amusement in watching these efforts to bring England back to the true faith. They have no adverse influence on the development of Freethought, and here and there serve to remind believers what a hotch-potch of stupidities and futilities go to make up the religions of the world. God's first job ought to have been to have secured harmony among his children, at least with regard to *him*. The actual result is that the more people talk of God the less certain they are as to what God is like, what he wants and what he does, and the greater their love of God the easier they are roused to hatred of their fellow men. If we could only have a religious moratorium for a few generations!

We said something of the fetish-worshipping character of the Coronation and its return to the jungle, but we must confess we hardly expected to find the following, which we take from the *New Statesman*, when the ballyhoo had once passed:—

The portion of the carpet where the Throne stood and the King knelt at the Coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey has been bought for Winchester Cathedral, and will be placed in the sanctuary. The following are extracts from letters to the Dean of Winchester from the Office of Works:—

Your carpet is even more interesting than my previous letter foreshadowed. You will find on it some slight red marks; the two side by side represent the positions where stood the chairs occupied by the King and Queen in front of the Royal box. The third mark indicates the position of the stool where the King knelt during the Communion Service. Most interesting of all, in the op-

posite corner of the carpet stood the Throne. Its position is not indicated by any mark, but I think that you will be able to trace, even at this date the imprints of the feet of the Throne.

We don't know of any tribe of savages that could better this. But what a pity it is that the Yahoos who can stomach this kind of thing cannot get a gramophone record of the King blowing his nose or giving a right royal "cuss" when he trips over something in his bedroom. To those who will go to Winchester to worship the carpet such things would be priceless.

Roman Catholic Archbishop Hinsley laments that "true" liberty is being assailed by "unparalleled licence." The Archbishop means, of course, *Christian* liberty, and that in practice has always meant the right to say what one pleases, provided that what one pleases to say is what pleases the Christian Church that happens to be in power. In Rome the Church finds it quite possible to stomach the brutal suppression of Italian freedom by Mussolini, and had not Hitler made the mistake of trying to bring the Roman Church to heel, the Pope would have extended his blessings to Germany. The Roman priesthood as champions of liberty reminds one of what a complete divorce there always has been and is between truth and the "great lying Church." Even the statements of what Roman Catholicism teaches are modified in their presentation in different countries.

We are hearing of Cinema Services in this country as the latest device of the Church to lure the worldly-minded to the communion-rail. They are much more enterprising in the States. At the Angelus Temple of the Four-square Gospel in Los Angeles, a theatrical version has been given of the life of "Saul called Paul." All the good "stuff" was produced—including the sun-stroke with its holy outcome. Then to follow, we had Paul stoned with property rocks, some of them bounding off and harmlessly colliding with members of the congregation. (Many of the ungodly laughed at this!) Then weird dances by females, and eventually Paul was led to the block. The curtain showed the executioner bending down and seizing a property head with an awful face and a bloody neck, and holding it up, while the hot gospeller improved the occasion to thunders of applause. A congregation of five thousand encouraged this enterprise. The *Recall to Religion* must observe and consider.

A writer in the *British Weekly* takes pains to assure us that "Christians can never accept a Totalitarian State." And why not? The writer seems to us to contradict his own declaration, for he admits that "the final idea of Christianity is that it is totalitarian." He evidently means that Christianity wants a Dictatorship but not Hitler. Mussolini probably says the same thing. He prefers Mussolini.

Mr. Hugh Redwood, in the *News-Chronicle*, says that as a result of the Keswick Convention many of those who attended have been blessed with an entirely new vision of the Church. It would have been more useful if they had been enabled to see the Church as it really is.

Ten thousand dollars worth of damage by fire was done to the Pico Heights Christian Church, but a painting of Jesus, Martha and Mary, valued at 500 dollars, was saved. The Lord looks after his own. There are several instances on record of extreme sensitiveness as to the well-being of family portraits, so this weakness is perhaps excusable.

Westbrook Pegler, in the columns of the *Los Angeles Evening News*, calls attention to the fact that a football game was arranged for charity which raised half-a-million dollars for the Salvation Army, "a fund which, in the box office of a private producer, would have received the hearty attention of the internal revenue department."

As a sport writer at the time, I looked and looked for a detailed publication of the charitable application of

this half-million, but never saw one, and I have often had an hottest curiosity, and the thought that the least the public deserved was a certified statement showing how much good the money did.

Religious people will be able to tell this writer that the only charity that is worth a cent is the charity that thinketh no evil.

A follower of Father Divine has been sentenced to three years for seducing a seventeen-year-old girl. Judge Yankwich said:—

Your attempt to justify your acts upon religious grounds aggravates the situation. . . .

You claim to have had a vision. I do not think that a vision which encourages a mature man to degrade and debauch a girl in her teens is a true religious vision.

The Judge's caution on this point is worth noting. If the outcome of the "vision" had been less repulsive to him it looks as if the plea of "a true religious vision" might have been favourably received.

The learned Judge, to put it as favourably as possible, was perhaps reflecting that what are given out to be quite important events rest upon the authority of someone who appeared to someone else in a dream.

Lester Brockelhurst, 23 years of age, who had been a Bible-class teacher, must have pored too studiously over the peccadilloes of Samuel and David, for he has confessed in New York to having murdered at least three men in Illinois, Arkansas and Texas.

The following limerick appears as part of an article on "Mixed Marriage," by the Very Reverend Dr. Inge, until lately Dean of St. Paul's. We are not condemning the Dean's humour, we are only making an alibi for ourselves by giving the very Rev. ex-Dean as our authority for what he calls a "Mendelian Limerick," as follows:—

"There once was a person called Starkie,
Who had an affair with a darkie;
The result of his sins
Was quadruplets, not twins,
One black and one white, and two khaki."

Fifty Years Ago

CONFUCIUS took no heed of religion. The welfare of the people, the right government of the State, and the prosperity of the empire were the great objects of his solicitude. Every one of his recorded utterances has direct bearing on the conduct of life. He was a moralist who neither appealed to supernatural sanctions nor to future rewards and punishments. Prayer has no place in his system, which, consequently, his missionary translator considers very defective. He did not call himself the way, the truth, the life, or declare that all who came before him were thieves and robbers. He said: "I was not one who was born in the possession of knowledge; I am one who is fond of antiquity, and earnest in seeking it there." He avoided all references to the supernatural. His disciples record "The subjects on which the Master did not talk were prodigious things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings." The poor heathen, in his blindness, did not know anything of a personal God, or how he had passed condemnation upon the world for the sin of Adam, or that he would send his Son, the same God as himself, to redeem the guilty by being put to death by his peculiar people. He taught conduct instead of creed, and he anticipated Jesus in the enunciation of the "golden rule." He bases his system of morals on reason and investigation. "The superior man," he said, "is Catholic and no partisan." "He does not set his mind for anything or against anything; what is right he will follow."

Confucius objected to unreasoning acquiescence in anything. He complained of one disciple "Hwuy gives me no assistance. There is nothing I say in which he does not delight."

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THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTÉ

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

F. C. HOLDEN (U.S.A.).—See "Acid Drops."

T. B. JONES.—We are obliged for cuttings. We cannot say exactly how many Freethinkers there are in Parliament, but it is quite certain there are more than are generally known. We cannot say when Mr. Cohen will be visiting Birkenhead.

W. HUMPHREY.—Your motto is a good one. We are pleased to find that after thirty years your attachment to the *Freethinker* remains unweakened. Fortunately you are not alone in this particular.

JUAN STORRIE (Spain).—Papers are being sent. We hope they reach you safely.

G. J. WARREN.—Many thanks for cuttings.

H. J. HEWER.—Your Christian friend is talking rank nonsense. All peoples invent beginnings for their history, and the Christian Church did the same thing for their founder. It was not until the early part of the sixth century that our present chronology was adopted, and not until the eighth that it was introduced into Britain. When people find it advisable to trace their descent one must always be on the look-out for myth. When a man thinks that the use of "A.D." proves that Jesus Christ lived, he is past argument.

A Church or an asylum appears to be his "spiritual home." ARTHUR ZENOO.—There were a number of protests from the Christian pulpits of this country against the Hitlerite persecutions of Jews and others. Sir Austen Chamberlain and other prominent politicians also raised their voices in protest.

To Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—Don Fisher, 48.

Will Mr. Wingate, late of Perth Branch N.S.S. send his address to Mr. J. V. Shortt, 24 Warmington Road, Knotty Ash, Liverpool.

SEVERAL letters are held over till next week.

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

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

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

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

Around a picture of a fake miracle of an appearance of the Virgin Mary in an Italian village, Miss Tennyson Jesse has written an excellent novel, with a good study of character. To call *Act of God* a novel, in these days when so much rubbish is turned out, and so much of it gains popularity—thanks to log-rolling advertisement and the uncritical character of the majority of readers—is hardly complimentary, but Miss Jesse has adopted that form, and makes excellent use of it. The Freethinking Colonel, the gentle-natured, tolerant Bishop (just a suggestion of Victor Hugo here) make good foils, and the manner in

which the Bishop handles the subject, when threatened with a scandal when the discovery is made that the whole vision is the work of an Englishwoman, is well done. The death of the Bishop helps the author out of a tangle, but the clerical psychology is very neatly depicted. Christian Science, Oxford Groupism, and other forms of religious belief come in for discussion, but the author never makes the mistake of preaching at her audience. *Act of God* is essentially a Freethinking novel, and we commend it to our readers. The book is published (Heinemann) at 7s. 6d.

Messrs. Watts and Co., have added two more volumes to their "Changing World" Series (2s. 6d. each). A great deal of *Radio is Changing Us*, by Mr. D. C. Thomson, is hardly better than journalism, but the survey is wide, and it is made evident that a great deal of dissatisfaction exists in many directions. We think the main fault is that Radio in England has created another form of semi-governmental control of the minds of the people, when what was needed was some plan that would correct a general educational system that would to some extent correct the unavoidable evils of State-controlled education. And when one has a religious bigot such as Sir John Reith, with the fake nature of many of his productions, and a religious committee working for the protection of religious beliefs, the situation must be unsatisfactory. However, Mr. Thomson's book does contain a general survey of the situation, and that will be useful to all who read it.

The second of the two books, *Psychology, The Changing Outlook*, by Dr. Francis Aveling, the Professor of Psychology at London University, is very well done. Psychology is a very large subject nowadays, and Dr. Aveling suffers under obvious disadvantages in discussing it, on both the theoretical and practical sides, but he comes through the ordeal with flying colours. A very good description is given of the various theories of psychology, and this is given without the lay reader being left in a state of uncertainty concerning them, which would most certainly have happened had space been taken up by attempts to estimate their relative values. The bearings of psychology on education, industry, medicine and criminology are given, and this will enable the layman to estimate the value of a scientific study of the whole subject. Like Molière's *M. Jourdain*, astonished that he had been talking prose all his life without knowing it, we all psychologise, and the sooner we get a working acquaintance with the subject, the better it will be for all of us. Dr. Aveling's book will serve as an admirable "guide to the perplexed," to use a title from Maimonides.

Mr. G. Whitehead returns to Birkenhead to-day (August 1), and will lecture each evening during the week. The local council's gallant effort to stifle Freethought by refusing to let the Town Hall to the local N.S.S. Branch should impel all saints within reasonable distance to whip-up lovers of free speech to attend the meetings and so gain first-hand evidence of the propaganda which frightens the churches and scares the local council.

There is a story that during the Italian massacre in Abyssinia, an Abyssinian N.C.O. was training a group of his poorly-equipped followers, while a number of baboons took an enormous interest in the procedure. Next day, when the officer arrived to continue the instruction, he saw the baboons lined up in military formation with pieces of stick, trying to imitate what they had seen the day before—which reminds us of a picture printed in *New York Life*, during the early days of the war. Mr. and Mrs. Monkey and two children, were up in a tree, watching thousands of men killing each other with bombs, machine guns and artillery, in a great plain below; and underneath:

Mr. Monkey: And they say that these creatures have descended from us!

Mrs. Monkey: Sh! the children will hear you.

A Profligate Parson?

BEFORE accepting this description of the Rev. Sydney Smith, it would be well to consider who was the author. It was Geo. IV., who thus referred to Sydney. All that we need to remember is that the lamented Monarch was a very good judge of profligacy.

From a volume by Hesketh Pearson, on *The Smiths of Smiths*, we get an admirable account of this remarkable parson. In the Preface we find many expressions of opinion as to Sydney's qualities—most of them flattering. Notable exceptions were Byron's, who dubbed him "Smug Sydney," and the aforementioned assessment of the profligate King. For the rest, they mostly eulogize Sydney's wonderful gifts.

For he must have been no ordinary man. Outspoken, kind, generous, full of vitality and good humour, during a long life he fought with tremendous energy for a long list of much-needed reforms. His trenchant pen spared neither friend nor opponent. Some of the Bishops must have regarded him as "a thorn in the flesh." On the subject of bishops generally he said: "It is in vain to talk of the good character of bishops. Bishops are men; not always the wisest of men; not always preferred for eminent virtues and talents, or for any good reason whatever known to the public. They are almost always devoid of striking and indecorous vices; but a man may be very shallow, very arrogant, and very vindictive; though a bishop. They are subjected to the infirmities of old age. . . . I have seen in the course of my life as the mind of the prelate decayed, wife bishops, daughter bishops, butler bishops, and even cook and housekeeper bishops."

When in Edinburgh he became one of the chief founders of the *Edinburgh Review*. To that magazine he contributed many scathing articles on the burning questions of the day. He abhorred slavery, and fought for Catholic Emancipation. Though he became a Canon of St. Paul's, after being Rector of several parishes, he fought manfully for Church Reform. Had he been more prudent he might have become a bishop himself.

Here is what he wrote about himself in reply to a French critic, asking for details:—

I am 74 years of age; and being Canon of St. Paul's in London, and a rector of a parish in the country, my time is equally divided. I am living amongst the best society in the Metropolis, and at ease in my circumstances; in tolerable health, a mild Whig, a tolerating Churchman, and much given to talking, laughing and noise. I dine with the rich in London, and physic the poor in the country; passing from the saucers of Dives to the sores of Lazarus. I am, upon the whole a happy man, and thankful to Providence for the part allotted to me in it.

Sydney was a rare trencherman in his time, and had a full measure of dining engagements. He could keep the table in a roar by his ludicrous remarks. Indeed some of the guests at times rolled on the floor in their mirth. His company was eagerly sought after by many notables of the day, and we find tributes from such persons as Harriet Martineau, Lady Holland, Lord Grey, Thos. Moore, Jeffrey, John Ruskin, Lincoln, Sarah Siddons, Dickens and many others.

Sydney it was, who was responsible for, perhaps the briefest and brightest witticism in our language. His doctor had advised him for health's sake to take a walk on an empty stomach, and Sydney's query was, "Whose?" A fellow-clergyman had objected to bury Dissenters in his parish. When Sydney was asked if he would have objected he mordantly replied, "Cer-

tainly not. I should like to be burying them all day." In the same vein he once solemnly affirmed that it would give him much pleasure to roast a Quaker. "Just one." Methodism he heartily disliked, though his relations were friendly towards a variety of sects. After visiting a puritanic family he wrote: "I endeavour in vain to give them more cheerful ideas of religion, to teach them that God is best served by a regular tenour of good actions—not by bad singing, ill-composed prayers and eternal apprehensions. But the luxury of false religion is to be unhappy."

It was Sydney who said of the oppressive heat that there was nothing for it but to take off his flesh and sit in his bones. To someone who had grown fatter he said, "I didn't half see you when we met last year." When a pretty girl admiring the flowers in his garden said, "Oh, Mr. Sydney! this pea will never come to perfection," he replied, "Permit me then to lead perfection to the pea." His definition of marriage was cute. "It resembles a pair of shears, so joined they cannot be separated, often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing anyone who comes between them."

Humorous too, was his advice tendered to the Bishop of New Zealand, when he had to receive the Cannibal Chiefs there, Sydney wrote: "I deeply regret, sirs, to have nothing on my own table suited to your tastes, but you will find plenty of cold curate and roasted clergyman on the sideboard," and if, in spite of this, they should end their repast by eating the Bishop likewise "I sincerely hoped he would disagree with them."

His real home was in London where he could meet some of the choicer spirits of his time. He rather disliked the country, though he spent some years at Foston in Yorkshire, and was also Rector of Coombe Florey, but he always hankered for the delights of London Society. He must have shocked some of the weaker brethren in those days. "My idea of heaven," he said, "is eating *pâtés de foie gras* to the sound of trumpets," and his attitude to the Puseyites of his day, may be gauged by his reply to a letter from one of them, dated with some Saints' Day, by dating his—"Washing Day."

As examples of his boisterous humour one might quote dozens of passages. Someone mentioned that a young Scot was going to marry an Irish widow, twice his age, and more than twice his size. "Going to marry her," cried Sydney. "Impossible! You mean a part of her; he could not marry her all himself. It would be a case, not of bigamy, but trigamy; the magistrates should interfere. There is enough of her to furnish wives for a whole parish. You might walk round her, if there were frequent resting-places, and you were in rude health. You might read the Riot Act and disperse her, in short you might do anything but marry her."

This brilliant jester, and pungent reformer passed away in February, 1845. Falstaff and Merry England had departed. His loss was deeply mourned by all classes, but more especially by his more intimate friends—Jeffrey, Macaulay, Grey, Lord John Russell, Rogers, Moore, Luttrell and Chas. Dickens. Greville in his diary sketched Sydney's character in these terms: I do not suppose he had any dogmatic and doctrinal opinions in respect to religion; in his heart of hearts he despised all that the world wrangles and squabbles about; but he had the true religion of benevolence and charity, of peace and goodwill, which, let us hope to be all sufficient, be the truth of the great mystery what it may.

ALAN TYNDAL.

Thomas Woolston—1669-1733

In a volume of "Letters addressed to his highness, the Prince of —, containing Comments on the writings of the most eminent authors, who have been accused of attacking the Christian Religion" [1767] Voltaire writes:—

The famous Wolston, too, Master of Arts at Cambridge, distinguished himself, about the year 1726, by his Discourses against the miracles of Jesus Christ; and so openly hoisted the flag of defiance, that he had his work sold at his own house in London. There were three successive editions of it, of ten thousand copies each. [Sixty pamphlets, were written in opposition. Wheeler, B.D.F.] No one ever before had gone to such lengths of rashness and scandal. He considers the miracles and resurrection of our Saviour, as no better than childish absurd stories. He says, that when Jesus Christ changed water into wine, for guests who were already drunk, it was that he probably made punch. God carried away by the Devil to the pinnacle of the temple and to the summit of a mountain whence were to be seen all the kingdoms of the earth, appears to him a shocking blasphemy. The Devil sent into a herd of two thousand swine, the fig-tree dried up for not bearing figs at the time it was not the season of figs, the transfiguration of Jesus, the white raiment, his conversation with Moses and Elias; in short, his whole sacred history, is turned into travesty, and made a ridiculous romance. Wolston does not spare for using the most injurious and contemptuous expressions. He often calls our Lord Jesus Christ "a Fellow, a Wanderer, a begging Friar." He solves all this, however, under favour of a mystical sense, saying, that these miracles are pious allegories. All good Christians do not the less hold his works in detestation.

One day that a woman, heated with devout zeal, met him in the street, she spit in his face; he wiped it off very coolly, and said, "It is thus that the Jews treated your 'God.'" He died in peace of mind, saying, "This is a pass to which every man must come."

You will find in the portable Dictionary of the Abbot Advocat, and in a new portable Dictionary, where the same errors are copied, that Wolston died in prison, in 1733. Nothing can be falsier; several of my friends saw him since his prosecution, in his own house where he died at liberty.

All the above statements Voltaire had already published in his Philosophical Dictionary, 1764, in his article on *Miracles*, with quotations from Woolston's *Six Discourses on the Miracles*.

Thomas Woolston was born at Northampton in 1669, and was the son of a reputable trader. After a Grammar School education in that town, he studied at Sidney-Sussex College, Cambridge, where "he took his degree of Bachelor of Divinity, but his circumstances would not allow him to take his Doctor's degree." However, he was elected a Fellow of his college in 1690, and took orders. A 32 pp. pamphlet entitled, *The Life of Mr. Woolston with an Impartial Account of his Writings*, was published in London shortly after his death in 1733, and from it the foregoing, and most of the following particulars are taken. This pamphlet is rare, and we think the information will be new to most of our readers.

In 1705 he published at the University Press, *The Old Apology for the Truth of the Christian Religion Against the Jews and Gentiles revived*. In this work which contains nearly 400 pages in octavo, he endeavours to prove all the actions of Moses typical of Christ and his church; and he shows how some of the Fathers understood them not to be real, but typical relations of what was to come. This Book has much ancient learning in it, and is writ in a clear, though not delicate, style. From this time to the year 1720, he

published nothing; and he led, as he had done before, a College life, applying himself indefatigably and with great earnestness to his studies, which were chiefly in Divinity; and he is allowed to have been a great Master of the writings of the Fathers.

In the year 1720 he published a Latin Dissertation in octavo of betwixt 40 and 50 pages, the title of which is *Dissertatio de Pontii Pilati ad Tiberium Epistola circa Res Jesu Christi gestas. Per Mystagogum*. In this Dissertation he attempts to prove that Pontius Pilate did write a letter to Tiberius Cæsar concerning the works of Jesus Christ, but that the Epistle delivered down to us among the writings of the Fathers was forged. In the same year he published another small pamphlet in Latin, entitled *Origenis Adamantii Renati Epistola ad Doctores Whiteium, Waterlandium, Whistonium, aliosque Literatos hujus Sæculi Disputatores, circa Fidem verè orthodoxam ad Scripturarum Interpretationem*, and soon after, in the same year, he published a second epistle in Latin, under the same title, in which he follows the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures as in the first . . . In the same year he published a Letter, of near 70 pp. to Doctor Bennet, upon this question, *Whether the People called Quakers do not the nearest, of any other Sect in Religion, resemble the primitive Christians in Principles and Practice?* By Aristobulus. In the year 1721, he published another *Letter to Dr. Bennet, in Defence of the Apostles and primitive Fathers of the Church, for their allegorical Interpretation of the Law of Moses, against the Ministers of the Letter, and literal Commentators of this Age*. Mr. Woolston, soon after published an Answer to these two Letters, which are writ with some Wit and Humour, and more against another set of men than for the Quakers.

In the years 1723-24 came out Mr. Woolston's four *Free Gifts to the Clergy*, and his own Answer to them in five separate pamphlets, in which he pursues his allegorical Scheme, against hireling preachers who are Ministers of the Letter.

Soon after he published his *Moderator*, and two *Supplements to the Moderator*. These were occasioned by the Controversy betwixt Mr. Collins and his Opponents to *The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*: and in these he follows his allegorical Scheme.

The first prosecution against Mr. Woolston was for these Books; which was stopt by the intercession of Mr. Whiston—with whom Mr. Woolston had preserved a friendship from their youth.

Mr. Woolston, in 1726, published *A Defence of the Thundering Legion*, against Mr. Moyle's *Dissertation*.

In the years 1727-28-29 and 30 were published his *Six Discourses on the Miracles of Christ*, and his two *Defences* thereof. Some think that he has treated the subject in too ludicrous a manner; which, though it gives offence to many, is not without Admirers.

As aforementioned it rapidly ran through three editions. Thirty thousand copies were sold, and it caused a great commotion, being unlike his former works, circulated among the general public.

If the specimen paragraphs quoted by Voltaire are fair samples of the whole work, it certainly ridicules "Holy Writ" and "the Old Old Story" in the slashing style of Lucian, who showed up "the gods of the Greeks" in similar fashion exhibiting their personages and exposing their fabled actions with withering scorn and ever-ready wit.

A second Prosecution commenced against Mr. Woolston for his first four Discourses on the Miracles. At his trial he distinguished himself by several reasonable and smart speeches which he made to the Court. He said that he thought it very hard that he should be tryed by a set of men who, though otherwise very learned and worthy persons, were no more judges of the subjects on which he wrote, than he himself was a judge of the most crabbed points of the Law. He

told the Lord Chief Justice Raymond that when he talked to the Archbishop of Canterbury about his books and the prosecution against him, his Grace said that *he wished he had not dwelt so much on hireling Priests: "and here, my Lord, continues Mr. Woolston to the Lord Chief Justice, the shoe pinches."*

However Mr. Woolston was found guilty of writing, printing and publishing those books. He was sentenced (March, 1729) to a year's imprisonment and to pay a fine of one hundred pounds. He purchased the liberty of the Rules of the King's Bench, where he continued after the expiration of the year, through inability of paying the fine.

Although Voltaire so emphatically declared Woolston did not die in prison, and that friends of his visited him "at his own house, where he died at liberty"—the pamphlet from which I have quoted, and later writers, including Wheeler (B.D.F.), McCabe (B.D.M.R.), and J. M. Robertson, in his *Short History of Freethought* (p. 338) all state that he died in prison.

The pamphlet states at great length that Woolston died on Saturday, January 27, 1733, about 9 o'clock at night, after an illness which lasted but four days, a disease which was then epidemical, viz., a violent cold attended with pains in the head and bones. . . . About half an hour before he died he was sitting by the fire in his bed-chamber, when he asked his nurse to help him to bed, and a few minutes before his death he uttered these words: "This is a struggle which all men must go through, and which I bear not only patiently but with willingness." He then immediately closed his eyes and lips with his own fingers, seemingly with a design to compose his face with decency, without the help of a friend's hand, and then expired. He, through his short illness, behaved himself with a cheerful resignation, becoming a man of probity, understanding and learning, a character which is not in the power of all his enemies to rob him of. . . . He was buried on Tuesday, January 30, in St. George's Churchyard, in Southwark; he died a bachelor.

To the character, which I have already given of him, I may join that of an exemplary meek and temperate person; and he has often declared to myself and many other of his friends, that if he was possessed of more than sixty pounds a year he could not spend more on himself, so great, he said, was the pleasure which he found in temperance.

We have two portraits of this eminent man, one by *Vanderbank* and another by *Dandridge*; that by the latter has a near resemblance; but the work of the former is esteemed a fine picture as well as a just likeness.

I have nothing further, [concludes the biographer], to add but this. I am sincerely grieved when I think that in the *Annals* of this excellent reign it will be told that a person died under persecution for Religion.

Alas, this writer did not foresee how this persecution so strengthened the powers of priestcraft and forcibly suppressed free expression that later, in the same reign, one Jacob Hive, for denying in a pamphlet the truth of Revelation, 1753, was pilloried thrice and sent to hard labour for three years, and in the next reign the great Peter Annet, at the age of 70 (1763) was pilloried twice and suffered a year's hard labour for his vigorous denial of the authenticity and credibility of the Scriptures in his *Free Enquirer*.

I have given the exact words of Voltaire and the author of the *Life of Woolston*, because they were his contemporaries, and acquainted with him and his works, and hope what they wrote will be as interesting to other readers as to myself. Had I re-written it in my own words it would only have been a "*Second-hand article*."

ELLA TWYNAM.

Nature Notes of a Freethinker

"And after her came jolly June, array'd
All in greene leaves, as he a Player were;
Yet in his time he wrought as well as play'd,
That by his plough-yrons mote right well appeare.
Upon a Crab he rode, that him did beare
With crooked crawling steps an uncouth pase,
And backward yode, as Bargemen wont to fare
Bending their force contrary to their face;
Like that ungracious crew which faines demurest grace."
Spenser.

SOMETHING unique in my own experience with birds has been encountered in the month of June. A blackbird's nest had grown in a few days in a honeysuckle bush outside the window of the house. The period of sitting with the hen had been gone through, four weird heads with sightless eyes on long thin necks had appeared, above the rim of the nest and in due course the young ones gained feathers and were ready to fly. One sunny evening, a cry had brought me outside with a poker to find a disappearing rat after it had ravaged the nest. "Who the deuce am I to help Providence?" I ruminated as I took from the nest the last young one with half its side eaten out. The other three had luckily escaped; one of them, solitary and dazed was taken indoors, fed, petted and finally put out on the grass to the cock. He coaxed it to some disused trellis work, and whilst it was entering at the base among elder and nettles, the cock set up a cackle utterly unlike every note of a blackbird. "Go under there and stop and be quiet, and if you move, look out!" was the human translation of a new language from a blackbird. This young one is now very tame, hops towards us instead of from us, and has settled down to the task of living. Within two days of the ravaging, the cock and hen had begun to build again with their three months to be fed in addition. From this new nest the pair were driven away by a pair of pugnacious sparrows, claiming a prior right to the spot, and they built elsewhere.

The cock linnet, with a reason almost unknown, sings while the hen is building, and I watched him, with his ruddy breast, twittering in a poplar tree. Nest was finished, eggs came along, young ones followed, and one morning, the nest must have been ransacked by another rat. Caught on thorns was a young bird, cold and lifeless, and ants were scurrying to and fro over its featherless skin. William Blake, who did not bother to question unquestionable matters, in his poem "The Tiger," has in it one line:—

"Did He who made the lamb make thee?"

Did the hand that fashioned the linnet's throat and paint its breast less ruddy than the robin's make the rat? To take sides is to enter a Chinese labyrinth. It would be as bad as accepting Paley's argument from the watch. Pausing to peck and look, with giddy and amazing and unreasoning flights, to us, birds are beset by enemies on all sides. That they are as tame as they are is mysterious to me; Richard Jefferies states that "birds are lively, intellectual, imaginative, and affectionate creatures, and all their movements are not dictated by mere necessity." This is true, as anyone knows who has made friends with a robin. He will come in the house, ignore food, perch in turn on the wheel of a sewing machine, the coal-scuttle, a chair back or the top of a gum boot. And if he feels like it, will give you a song, *planissimo*, from the door-mat. I cannot make him come into the house and sing; that he does it of his own free will proves to me that he has one enemy the less in his world.

June has come and gone; roses which were late are now showing renewed beauty, and one variety, the Portadown Fragrance, sent some lines of Browning dancing in my mind. This particular rose is generous in size, and when fully out is a picture of loveliness. The outer petals are pink, and colours converging to the centre of its exquisite shape are an incredible blend of pink, orange, copper and yellow. The fragrance is pronounced at a time when perfume is being sacrificed to colour and shape. I had been thinking on the rat's tooth, the in-

offensive and pathetic eye of the young bird, the agon of time that this merciless warfare has been waging between animal and bird, first causes, to be dismissed, purpose, and then the rose sent me to refresh the lines of Browning:—

"But by the time youth slips a stage or two
While reading prose in that tough book he wrote
(Collating and emendating the same
And settling on the sense most to our mind).
We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.
Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—
Another Boehme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say,—
Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about?
He with a "look you!" vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all,—
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life."

Praise then for Browning; if man lets go of himself these days, there are enough distractions to make him qualify for Bedlam; there are enough gee-gaws, physical and mental to so inveigle him in spoof that he will "shut the clasp and find life's summer past." And amid the frowzy sensationalism of nearly all newspapers, wrong values praised, modern medicine-men in abundance, mob at top and mob below, a correspondent from California writes to me as follows: "The thing to do is to maintain one's poise in the presence of daily and continuous idiocy on the part of the public and its exploiters. There are not enough of us to do much besides maintain that same poise, and await opportunity to use it in the ways that may be advantage alike to us and the muddled population of this planet." I agree with him, and will, for the editor, sing his song twice over of wise words written in the *Freethinker* of March 21 this year. The subject was newspapers. The reader "must read them as an alienist stores up a record of delusions and phobias in order to diagnose the cases with which he had to deal." With his usual clarity he put newspapers in the right place, and *Freethinkers* would do well to put the whole memorable article in the pocket-book of their minds. For constant reference too, for time spent on reading newspapers for any other reason would be better expended on contemplation of the sky, a blade of grass, or that lovely rose whose praises I have imperfectly sung.

NICHOLAS MERE.

Correspondence

THE ARCHBISHOP'S HUMANITY

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—As the Archbishop of Canterbury has of late given us so much pious advice on the subject of religion, I think it should not be forgotten that in 1914, when he was Archbishop of York, he performed a eulogistic service over an aged fox-hunter at the church of Moor Monkton, where he gave expression to the old threadbare fallacies in palliation of that degraded sport—that the fox "wins protection" by being hunted; that hunting develops "courtesies to man and beast"; that it "draws the classes together," and so on. To the memory of the old clergyman who had broken his neck in the hunting-field a stained window—a very stained window, as was remarked at the time—was dedicated.

HENRY S. SALT.

COMMUNISM AND FASCISM

SIR,—Before your correspondent lumps together Communism and Fascism, let him recall that Communism stands for rationality and complete economic and political equality, equality of women with men, the abolition of racial fanaticism, the enthronement of science. Fascism stands against all these things.

The elements that the abstract-rationalist dislikes in Communism are not inherent in the system, but are merely transitional, conditions forced into being by the fact that the Soviet Union exists in a "military situation" owing to imperialist menace.

Let the objector weigh the concrete facts of the situation in which a Socialist State (working towards Communism) must find itself in an imperialist world, and then let him pronounce judgment. Anyone who studies the movement of Soviet society in the light of its advancing constitutional changes will be convinced that the claim made above is no mere propagandist "excuse."

JACK LINDSAY.

IMMORTALITY

SIR,—Mr. Taylor, in your issue for July 18, will no doubt agree that a struggle for existence implies some sort of impulse to exist. And if evolution is a universal process, that impulse to exist will be present as much in the inorganic as in the organic world. Natural selection will operate among molecules, atoms and electrons as well as among living organisms.

There is, moreover, no particular reason why matter should begin at a certain elementary point. If we could trace matter back far enough, we might find that it finally faded away into nothing. Existence may well be continuous with non-existence.

Survival, apparently, is all that is of importance in the Universe. The distinctive characteristics of what we call a living organism, assimilation and reproduction, must have been evolved because they had survival value.

But how is survival to be measured—by long life, by security, or by both? Let us consider long life, and the possibility of unending life. I grant that it would be somewhat odd for an immortal soul to make a sudden appearance in one of a series of small gaps; but the improbability becomes less if life after death for longer and longer periods had been gradually acquired by a line of ancestors.

I am not, of course, advancing a serious argument for an immortal soul. I am merely indicating the slight possibility that Nature, for all we know, may be aiming at immortality under other than material conditions.

R. A. HANLON.

"POISONOUS" FICTION

SIR,—Mr. C. S. Fraser is always interesting in his contributions to your columns, but I would respectfully suggest that his article this week is very wide of the mark. If a *Freethinker* cannot admire the writings of the great artists of the past and present—the Brontës, Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, R. L. Stevenson, Hardy, Eden Phillpotts, the Powys Brotherhood, H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, and all the rest—he should not fall into the error of accusing all who do so from being mental dope-fiends.

And even purely entertaining fiction—the work of such writers as Dorothy L. Sayers or P. G. Wodehouse—does it not do its part in giving people healthy relief from the trials and tribulations of the modern world? If one brooded on the troubles and injustices of existence, on the prospects of war, on the horrors of dictatorial regimes, and all the other dreadful possibilities that loom on the not too distant horizon, one would go mad. As a writer who has endeavoured to give readers entertainment value, I resent Mr. Fraser's suggestion that all I have been doing is acting as a kind of mental opium-peddler. Would Mr. Fraser apply the same criticism to Leslie Henson, Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn, William Powell, Myrna Loy, and other outstanding actors of stage and screen? To be logical he should do so, and should denounce, in the strongest terms he can command, the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Defoe, Fielding, Goldsmith, Sheridan, and others—in short, should destroy nine-tenths of what is finest in all the grand heritage of English literature.

JOHN ROWLAND.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD "GOD"

SIR,—In your issue of July 25, your leading article has some remarks on "Atheism," with which I, to some extent, disagree. May I, therefore, be allowed to express my own views on the subject?

In the ancient world the word "God" was applied to the stars in the heavens. In Egyptian mythology the sky above us was regarded as the cosmic ocean through which the gods passed daily in their boats. These gods were obviously highly intelligent beings, as they kept better time than any mere man was able to do. On one occasion a mass of meteorites passed through the cosmic ocean and was called the "Leviathan" or the great fish. This fish swallowed up Jonah, that is Christ the Moon-god, but after three days Christ was seen to rise again from the dead. In the mythologies of other races of mankind the sky was assumed to consist wholly of air and, consequently, denizens of the sky were drawn with wings as an indication of their place of residence, that is, they were celestial and not terrestrial beings. The Devil, a new star which appeared suddenly out of the blue to mankind, is given wings as an ideograph. He was apparently first seen by the ancestors of the Greeks in the constellation Capicorn, and as he grew bigger and bigger in the bosom of the She-goat men were quite certain she had nursed him. From this we find to-day that the Devil has wings, goat's horns, a tail and a cloven hoof.

Taking into consideration the ancient meaning of the word "God" I am a Polytheist, as I see the gods every night. If, however, any one asks me whether I believe in a deity who pervades all space, who is invisible, who is without form and mass, who is omnipotent, who possesses supreme knowledge and intelligence, I can only give a decided NO as an answer. In this respect I am an out and out Atheist.

WILLIAM CLARK.

We had to pass the Church of San Marcello, and we thought we would just look in. It was crowded, service was going on, and a young Italian priest was preaching. "What," I thought as I entered, "a woman preaching in a Catholic Church!" But it was not a woman's voice at all. Its melody had deceived me. It was a golden voice—wielding a golden language; a voice such as one hears twice or thrice in a lifetime; a voice like nothing so much as Sarah Bernhardt's in its beautiful prime. My companions floated away, as I did, on the stream of its lovely music. It was not necessary to understand what was said to be delighted. It was like listening to a sonata or a "song without words." And as we left, after some ten minutes, we could not help reflecting that the Pope had beaten the Congress in the matter of oratory—at least in placing that special preacher in a church in the very same street. Yes, although we fight the Church, and hope to conquer it, we may yet learn from it how to organize, and how to suit our propaganda to the indestructible emotions of human nature. And we fighters in the desert salute those who will some day enter the Promised Land. They may not be born yet, but we salute them all the same. We may never know them; they may never know us. But we fought for them. We did not battle for tents on sand, though we had to rest in them. We battled for palaces of peace and temples of humanity in the land which our successors shall inherit.—G. W. Foote

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

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

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Kingston Market): 8.0, Saturday, A Lecture. 7.0, Sunday, A Lecture.

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, A Lecture. Rushcroft Road, near Brixton Town Hall, 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. L. Ebury. Cock Pond, Clapham Old Town, 8.0, Friday, Mrs. E. Grout.

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

BANKHEAD: 8.0, Thursday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BEDLINGTON STATION: 7.0, Wednesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BIRKENHEAD BRANCH N.S.S. (Park Entrance): 7.30, Sunday. Well Lane, 7.30, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Park Entrance, 7.30, Friday. Haymarket, 7.30, Saturday. Mr. G. Whitehead will speak at each meetings.

BOLTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Town Hall Steps, Bolton): 7.0, Sunday, Mr. J. Clayton. Town Hall Steps, 7.30, Thursday. Mr. J. V. Shortt (Liverpool).

HAPTON: 7.30, Monday, Mr. J. Clayton

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

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Eccles Cross): 8.0, Friday, Mr. J. V. Shortt. Alexandria Park Gates, 8.0, Saturday, Mr. W. A. Atkinson. Platt Fields, 3.0, Sunday, Mr. W. A. Atkinson. Stevenson Square, 7.0, Sunday, Mr. W. A. Atkinson.

NELSON (Chapel Street): 8.0, Wednesday, Mr. J. Clayton.

NEWCASTLE (Bigg Market): 8.0, Friday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

NORTH SHIELDS (Harbour View): 7.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"A Reply to the Spirits."

PRESTON (Market): 8.0, Wednesday, Mr. J. V. Shortt.

RAMSBOTTOM MARKET: 3.15, Sunday, Mr. J. Clayton.

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

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

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