

# THE FREETHINKER

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

## Views and Opinions

### War against God

CHRISTIAN critics of Atheism might nowadays be grouped under three heads. First come those who explain that Atheism has now very little standing in the intellectual world, it has very few followers, and no scientific authority whatever. Next those who explain that it is a view of life adopted mainly to escape the demands of the lofty morality of the Christian religion, and its advocates are either consciously or unconsciously anxious to provide warranty for an exhibition of very bad conduct. The third class agrees with the second in looking upon Atheism as of necessity striking at the roots of a healthy morality; it shouts from the housetops that Atheism is "rampant," dwells upon the necessity of keeping so demoralizing a thing from children and weak-minded people (this last class, by inference, includes the whole world of Christians) and ladies and gentlemen who have strayed into the House of Commons, apparently thinking it a Sunday school, have dilated upon the large number of Atheistical Sunday schools where children are encouraged to revile Jesus Christ, and are supplied with mats bearing his effigy, upon which they may wipe their feet. The proof of the number and diabolical character of these schools is that their whereabouts is kept a deadly secret. No one knows where they exist.

It is, therefore, interesting to find, once in a while, a book such as *War Against God*, by Mr. Sidney Dark (Editor of the *Church Times*), and Miss R. E. Essex. The work is almost free from misrepresentation, and although it cannot be called a study of Atheism, and still less a set criticism of it, it does try to present an impartial view of Atheism in the political world of to-day. The authors try to set forth the political, rather than the intellectual, standing of Atheism in Russia, Germany, Turkey, Mexico and Spain. There is a short chapter on England, although it can hardly be said that the mention of eight or nine men, some of whom would repudiate the

name of Atheist fairly represents the position of Atheism in this country. There are also a large number who, judged by their views, should be classified as Atheists. In this country, it must also be noted, that there has been provided a camouflage for Atheism by confusing a philosophical question with a religious one, and so creating an intellectual monstrosity which furnishes a cover for a something that may be described as a mental hybrid begotten by respectability out of timidity.

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### Atheism Past and Present

The aim of the two authors of *War Against God*, is a good one. It is to provide Christian writers and speakers with some idea of the quality and strength of Atheism in the world of to-day. So far as the political side is concerned, this is fairly done. But the slight historical sketch does not do justice to the scientific and philosophical side of Atheism, and while the compliment is paid the "present-day militant Atheist," that, "he can trace his ancestry to classic Greece," not many of the few mentioned by name in contemporary England thoroughly deserve the compliment. It is true that "the Greeks won for themselves liberty of thought and discussion in every realm that touches human life, material, mental and spiritual," and it is equally true that the Christian Church destroyed this liberty, and that the past four centuries have only partly recovered it. But this liberty of thought does not constitute Atheism. It is only one of the principal conditions out of which Atheism grows. The great work of the Greeks is that many of the best of them shut all gods out of their speculations. And those who admitted them, counted the gods as part of the universe. A careful statement by modern representative Atheists of the scientific and philosophic grounds upon which Atheism is based, would well have served to carry out the avowed purpose of the book before us. But that might have been too great an eye-opener for well-brained Christians.

If this had been done by a Christian of standing it would have been still more effective—particularly if published under the auspices of the editor of the *Church Times*. Only once has this kind of thing been done in England—by Ralph Cudworth, towards the end of the seventeenth century. But his "True Intellectual System" met with little approval from Christians. The statement of the case for Atheism was so powerfully done by Cudworth that his replies to them were obviously inadequate. He was called a Christian in the pulpit and an Atheist in his book. As a consequence the *True Intellectual System* was never completed. If any Christian of position cares to repeat Cudworth's effort, we promise to subscribe for a number of copies and to do what we can to assist its circulation.

On one point I am in complete agreement with



Mr. Dark and Miss Essex. They say they are "convinced that the defenders of orthodoxy are hopelessly handicapped by ignorance of the intellectual, social and moral bases of unbelief." I fully endorse that statement. In the course of nearly fifty years experience of Christians in controversy, I have very seldom met with one who had an adequate understanding of the position he was attacking. This includes Canon Storr, one of the ablest and fairest of Christian debaters with whom I have crossed swords. His lack of acquaintance with the Atheistic case, as put by a competent Atheist, was very evident.

The authors of *War Against God* say, "It is our purpose to set out the case against God as it is stated by His enemies." I dislike the last two words. I am not an enemy of God any more than I am an enemy of Jack-the-Giant-Killer, or of Odin. One is not an enemy of a myth; one merely explains its nature and discusses the reasons people see it as anything other than a myth. And I suggest to the authors that a description of Atheism in Russia, from the mouth of a Communist speaker is not setting out the whole case against belief in God, nor is it explaining the growth of Atheism in the modern world. The theory of God is quite separable from theories of Communism, and even from the greed and misbehaviour of the Church in Spain, Russia and Mexico. This rapacity and misbehaviour of the Church is admitted by the authors, but that does not weaken the case for Atheism. If the Church had been wholly free from moral blemish, the case for Atheism would be as strong as it is. An absurdity does not become wisdom because it is cherished by good men, and is free from deliberate moral wrong. The absence of moral wrong merely makes an absurdity more bearable. The more serious indictment of Christianity is that it has had so many good men and women in its service, and that it has distorted good qualities and moralized bad ones in the interests of the Church. A bad man pursuing a bad path offers evil enough, but this evil is small compared with that which accompanies a good man treading the same road. A number of influences may pull up the bad man and lead to a slackening of his efforts, but the driving power of the good man is intensified by his conviction that what he is doing is really good. I present Mr. Dark and Miss Essex with a generalization on which I would like them to try their wits. This is that the crowning crime of the Christian Church is that in all ages it has moralized actions which the civilized sense of mankind regards as unquestionably evil.

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#### Society and the Individual

It is to the credit of our authors that they write the following:—

We fully recognize the single-mindedness of the men who have waged or are waging war on God. We do not doubt that their desire is to unbandage the eyes of the people, that they may see, and seeing, that they may understand. If they were insincere, they would not matter. If they were, as certain good people appear to think, base self-seekers, rejoicing in crime and cruelty, they would not matter, and their little day would soon come to an end. . . . The God-idea has nothing to fear from the sensualist who resents interference with his guzzling, from the exploiter who resents interference with his oppression, from the lazy and foolish who hate to be told that life has serious and thrilling significance. Its dangerous enemies are serious-minded, high-souled men and women with developed social consciences.

In other words, the complaint against the Atheist is not that he is bad *with* his Atheism, but that he is good without God. That admission—we are justified

in calling it an admission on contrasting it with Christian usage—stands out in striking contrast to the bellowsings of most of the clergy, and the many statements of ignorant members of the House of Commons, when the subject of Atheism, particularly Russian Atheism, has been broached. And yet the stark truth of the statement should have been obvious to anyone not blinded by a religious training.

In a country where one form of religion is dominant, and not merely dominant, but tyrannical and brutal in the maintenance of its supremacy, it is a guarantee of sincerity (not of accuracy) in professing an opposite opinion. It is impossible for anyone to say with certainty of a man who praises Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy or Stalin in Russia, that he is completely honest. Of course, he may be honest, but then, again, he may not be. It is a consequence of empowered intolerance that it places a premium upon cowardice and hypocrisy, and endows open dissent with a twin badge of honesty and courage. No man in this country who aims at working a first-class swindle will, unless he is a born fool, initiate his proceedings with a profession of Atheism. No man who wishes to enter public life through either the portals of the House of Commons or through the doors of a local Council chamber, and publishes the fact that he is an Atheist, but heavily discounts his probable success. In a Christian country there is everything to lose and nothing to gain from a profession of Atheism—nothing, that is, but the retention of one's own self-respect. It is the fault of the Christian Church that it has made rascality easier for the professed believer than for the avowed unbeliever. What Mr. Dark and Miss Essex properly proclaim as necessary information for the "defenders of orthodoxy," should have been self-evident to them. Our authors deserve thanks for saying what they have said; none the less the need for its being said is an indictment of the Christian Church as grave as anything that could be drawn against it.

There are other aspects of *War Against God*, with which I will deal next week.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Hymns and Hysteria

"Talk about it as we like, a man's breeding shows itself nowhere more than in his religion."

O. W. Holmes.

We have been told by a distinguished metaphysician that literature is but a branch of social science, that he is greatest among authors who appeals to the widest circle of readers. If this were true, then were the hymn-writers the very princes of poets. Is there a church, chapel, or tin tabernacle, where their sacred effusions are not sung or howled? Is there a mission tent from John O'Groats to Land's End but derives alleged morality and intelligence from the lilt and the rhythm of the hymns? We trow not! Recognizing that all who run can read, the Christian Churches have circulated a poetic literature, and provided nothing to read which is beyond the understanding of the least educated and stupidest members of their congregations. We raise our hats to the clergy as very astute men of business, but our admiration is diluted by the critical thought that, after all, they have roped-in their congregations because they have never been able to rise above their low level of intelligence. Clerical culture is too largely taken for granted. Priests are not really educated: they are only educated in the patter of their sorry profession. *Punch* once hit this off in an excellent picture depicting a parson on his knees before a sceptic, saying:



"Pray, pray, don't mention the name of another foreign author, or I shall have to resign my living."

It is very doubtful if the average hymn has any more claim to be considered as real literature than the usual music-hall song, about which the dear clergy pretend to be so indignant. This may well appear a serious indictment, but the hymns which are regarded as being eminently suited for public worship are far too frequently antiquated, unrhymical, and nonsensical. Under the soporific influence of religion, the public has been far too ready to accept bombast and bleat as the fine gold of poetry, and has hailed hysteria in adjectives as the very quintessence of reverence.

The hymns used by Churchpeople and Nonconformists alike are not really much better than those painfully familiar and disgraceful compositions which are used by the Salvation and Church Armies, and other howling Dervishes of our streets and open spaces, which make cultured people almost ashamed of their own species. The charge of sentimentalism is not the only one that can be brought. Some hymns are Sadistic in tone and brutal in language, written in the worst possible taste, and are full of sanguinary details and a glowing satisfaction which are repulsive in the extreme. Here are some samples of "spiritual" melodies:—

"There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Emanuel's veins."

"Come, let us stand beneath thy cross,  
So may the blood from out his side  
Fall gently on us drop by drop;  
Jesus, our Lord, is crucified."

"Here I rest, for ever viewing  
Mercy poured in streams of blood."

"By the red wounds streaming  
With thy life-blood gleaming."

"Lift up thy bleeding hand, O Lord,  
Unseal that cleansing tide."

"O those limbs, how gannt their leanness,  
Tortured, torn for our uncleanness,  
On these stiff branches weltering."

If we turn to the purely literary aspect of these precious hymns, we find some of them outrages on the art of poetry. For sheer, downright, unadulterated bathos this triplet is worth noting:—

"Upon the Crucified One look  
And thou shalt read, as in a book,  
What well is worth thy learning."

The solitary attempt at rhyme in the following is sufficient to disqualify an amateur in a limerick competition:—

"Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask,  
This is the total sum;  
For mercy, Lord, is all my snit,  
Then let Thy mercy come."

The author's reason must have been tottering on its throne when he penned this pious outburst:—

"Faithful Cross, above all other  
One and only Noble Tree,  
None in foliage, none in blossom,  
None in fruit thy peer may be:  
Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,  
Sweetest weight is hung on Thee."

But the most nonsensical couplet of all occurs in the following:—

"May all these our spirits sate,  
And with love inebriate."

"These," as a reference to the preceding lines in the masterpiece of doggerel show, refer to "nails," "wounds," "vinegar," "thorns," and other realistic properties associated with the drama of the

crucifixion. Toplady's "Rock of Ages" is a perfect medley of irrational imagery and misapplied metaphors. "Cleft rock," "riven side," "to thy cross I cling," and "to the fountain fly," are examples. The confused imagery drowns the sense in the veriest verbiage.

Another popular favourite, "Hark! Hark! my soul," has upset even some Christians. It combines every conceivable violation of every conceivable rule. "Onward Christian Soldiers!" which is more popular than "The Roses of Picardy," is by no means above criticism. The last line of the chorus is commonplace in expression, and atrocious in rhyme.

There is a frankness of materialism in some of these alleged spiritual hymns, which is sufficient to make a sceptic smile:—

"Lord, I believe, Thou hast prepared,  
Unworthy though I be,  
For me a blood-bought free reward,  
A golden harp for me."

And again:—

"Oh! for the pearly gates of heaven,  
Oh! for the golden floor."

Indeed, plummet cannot sound the depths of ignorance and feeble-mindedness revealed in some of these precious effusions. These quotations, be it remembered, are from the classical and most distinguished hymnologies, and they are by no means the worst and most disgraceful of their class. If any reader wishes to explore the matter further, let him turn to the publications of the Romish press, the Salvation Army, and others, where he will find the work of Christian versifiers, weak in their mother tongue, unaffected by culture, but strong in the faith.

As miracles simply do not happen, a literary standard in hymns is more than can be hoped for. The State Church is notoriously weak among the upper and working classes, and especially among men. Hence we are not surprised at the inclusion of some appeals to the British workman. Listen to the sugary notes of the clerical syren:—

"Sons of Labour think of Jesus  
As you rest your homes within  
Think of that sweet babe of Mary  
In the stable of the inn.  
Think, how, in the sacred story  
Jesus took a humble grade.  
And the Lord of Life and glory  
Worked with Joseph at his trade."

Apparently, congregations do not expect, and do not ask for, literature in their hymns:—

"As long as the tune has a right good swing,  
It doesn't much matter what trash you sing."

And Lewis Carroll's advice to speakers: "Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves," is commonly inverted when applied to hymn-writing. Such hymns as have a microscopical claim to some literary merit are little esteemed by the public mind compared with "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," "The Glory Song," and "Tell Mother I'll be there."

What words, and what a religious tradition! To an outsider, hymns should suggest restraint, sobriety, the dignity of reverence, but the Aimée McPherson Mission, like the Torrey and Alexander crusade, the Billy Sunday revivals, and the Moody and Sankey combine, amply prove the association of the Christian Religion with hysteria, theatricality, and savage cultural survivals. What is far worse, these religious showmen gauged their public to a hair's-breadth nicety. Their audiences were, perhaps, better dressed and better schooled than those illiterates who listen spellbound to the trombones and tambourines of the Church and Salvation Armies, yet they sing



hymns of the most rank and fulsome sentimentality, and recking of barbarism. Christian congregations seem unable to distinguish between poetry and doggerel, between civilization and savagery. Singing their delicious rhymes, they are intellectually on a level with dark-skinned barbarians. Pure savages do this one way, and the countrymen of Gipsy Smith and the Archbishop of Canterbury another, but the nature of the act, and the results, are much the same. Is there not something wrong with our national education that large numbers of men and women should be so amenable to trash such as this?

MIMNERMUS.

## Holland's Oriental Isle

HOLLAND'S princely possession, the splendid island of Java, is one of the few sea-encircled Eastern areas possessing a known history. Its architectural ruins rival those of ancient Egypt in magnitude and artistry. Unlike the land of the Nile, Java contains throughout its whole extent an imposing array of volcanoes of which a score or more remain active. Yet it is a very densely populated island, and accommodates a larger number of inhabitants per square mile than Belgium, the most thickly populated country in Europe. Although only two thirds larger than Ireland, Java, in 1931, contained 40 million people, which is approximately five times the number dwelling in the Netherlands themselves.

This Oriental island has been the centre of a relatively advanced civilization from far distant times. Probably as early as the first century of our era, immigrants from India explored the island. At a later stage, the Hindus erected magnificent temples and other edifices, whose ruined remains astonish the visitor by their magnitude and splendour. Building seems to have begun towards the close of the seventh century, but the great mass of surviving monuments was constructed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Artistic achievement soon afterwards declined, and at the opening of the sixteenth century was destroyed by the Vandalism of the Moslem invaders. About 1478 Java's capital, Surabaya, was captured by Arab adventurers and pillaged and demolished. History remains silent for a time until Varthema, an Italian navigator, who seems to have been the first European to reach Java, landed there in 1505.

Despite Java's opulence, Portuguese explorers and merchants made no known attempt to annex it, although they established isolated trading stations on its coasts. But the Dutch arrived in 1595, and in 1610 erected a fort at Batavia. Still, it was not until 1677 that the Netherlanders took possession of any part of the territory. From that date until 1830, the Dutch were engaged in repeated conflict with the natives, at which time all serious resistance was overcome, and the entire island of Java and its neighbour Madura securely placed in Holland's hands.

Java has been the theatre of many violent and calamitous volcanic disturbances. The highest mountain in the island reaches a height of 12,044 feet, while ten of its fifty peaks exceed an altitude of 10,000 feet. The volcano, Salak, is now quiescent, but in 1699 its sudden eruption proved very disastrous. In his standard work, *Malaysia and the Pacific Archipelagoes* (Stanford), Dr. Guillemard records that: "Enormous masses of mud were ejected from the crater, and impeding the course of the rivers, caused the formation of lakes, which burst and devastated the country below them. In 1772 occurred its last eruption, which was one of the most

destructive in the history of the island, and was specially remarkable for its suddenness and short duration. A great part of the mountain seems to have been engulfed, and 40 villages and 4,000 people were destroyed."

Another disastrous upheaval was that of Mount Galunggung in 1822. All appeared serene; the sky was clear, and nothing indicated the impending calamity, when suddenly a heavy thundering was heard. Then, from the apparently extinct volcano a huge mass of cloud ascended which darkly overcast the previously blue heavens with awful rapidity, and completely shrouded the fair landscape in the blackness of night. Lightning flashed in all directions, while stones descending from the sky smote everything around. The crater then discharged great volumes of boiling water and hot mud, which ran down the mountain-side sweeping every tree, man and lower animal in its path to pitiless destruction. Almost all within a circuit of a score of miles was annihilated, while enormous masses of ejected materials fell to the earth at a distance of 40 miles. A few adjacent homesteads escaped the ravages of the streams of lava. Most villages were less fortunate, and what in the morning was a smiling prospect was by evening a mournful spectacle of utter desolation.

Four days later, a disturbance of still greater intensity occurred in company with a severe earthquake. The summit of the fire mountain was rent, and the fine forest that had covered one side of the volcano was converted into a yawning gulf. It is recorded that: "The rivers bore down to the sea the dead bodies of men, and the carcasses of deer, rhinoceroses, tigers and other animals. The base of the mountain could not be approached for a month, and the surrounding country was covered with a layer of mud, which, in places, was 50 feet in depth. The official accounts state that 114 villages were destroyed and 4,000 persons killed."

Travellers' tales of the Poison Valley and its death-dealing Upas Tree have now been discredited. These fictions probably arose from the fact that in a valley near Lake Talaga Bodas, the soil discharges carbon-dioxide in sufficient quantities to pollute the atmosphere and kill animals that traverse it. Civet cats, rodents, and even larger quadrupeds succumb to its fumes, as their remains demonstrate. But the sinister Upas Tree so fatal to all that lingered beneath its shade as well as to the fowls of the air that flew over it is now consigned to the realms of romance. There is indeed a lake in a crater in Eastern Java, as well as the stream that flows from it, so strongly impregnated with acid that no fish can survive in either river or pool.

Java is a well-watered island with numerous rivers. Although within the tropics, its heat is seldom excessive, and its temperature varies considerably with altitude. Hot, and a little unhealthy on the coast, it is pleasant and salubrious on the hills. On soils standing 3,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level, the climate is highly conducive to the cultivation of the cereals, vegetables, fruits and flowers of temperate regions, all of which have become completely acclimatized. Plant disease, however, seems a growing evil, and human ailments such as beri-beri and small-pox claim many victims in the towns, while outbreaks of cholera occur, one of which, in 1889, caused 16,000 deaths.

The island is less rich in faunal life than other adjoining areas. In some districts tigers still abound, but the tapir, elephant, bear, orang-utan and other mammals residing in the Malay Archipelago are entirely absent. But the rhinoceros, several species of deer, many monkeys, wild canines and swine dwell in Java. There is an immense variety of reptilian,



insect and piscatorial fauna, while the beetles and butterflies, many of which are strictly confined to Java, are of majestic dimensions and gorgeous coloration. The birds are perhaps not generally so splendidly plumaged, or so sweet in song as those in neighbouring regions, but forty species of land birds are peculiar to the isle.

Floral life is remarkably rich and diversified. The flora is so luxurious that one authority declares that: "The villages and even the smaller towns are in great measure concealed by the abundant and abiding verdure; and their position in the landscape is to be recognized mainly by their groves, orchards and cultivated fields." Indeed, despite Java's immense population, about one-fifth of its soil is covered by forests containing many timber trees of high commercial value. The teak is very abundant, and it is stated that its woodlands embrace an area of 2,500 square miles. Rice is extensively cultivated, and affords the staple food of the native people. Tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco, tin and rubber are all included in the island's exports.

Apart from a few Europeans and other immigrants, largely Chinese, the population is of Malay race. Long prior to the European invasion Java was a well-peopled and prosperous island, conducting a flourishing trade with neighbouring communities in exported rice and native manufactures. The art of irrigation has long been skilfully applied, and the vales and hillsides are well terraced. The water is supplied from adjacent streams, and every cultivated area can be flooded or dried as required. Very high praise has been bestowed on native agrarian efficiency, which dates back to early times.

One striking feature in Javanese life is the pronounced predominance of the native race. In a community of some 40 millions the European settlers in 1900 numbered 76,000 only. The Chinese were estimated at slightly over 500,000, a figure which includes a considerable proportion of half-breeds, the offspring of Chinese fathers and Malay mothers. It has been suggested that had Java become a British possession, the colony would long since have been the residence of planters and professional men. But until recently, it appears that the Dutch authorities have "discouraged the settler in every possible way. Even now, although these difficulties have been removed, and European immigrants are permitted, it cannot be said that much in the way of help or encouragement has been afforded them."

Save the ruins of the splendid temples erected by the Buddhist and Brahmin settlers in the Middle Ages, little remains of Hindu culture. A vast majority of the Javanese are professedly Moslem in religion. But the real faith in Java is primitive animism, and every occurrence is ascribed to the activities of baneful or benevolent spirits. As Webster observes: "The whole life of the Javanese is enveloped in a mesh of mystery; not the stars only, and the heavens, rain influence, but from every object a spiritual emanation, invisible for the most part, but potent and exhaustless, flows forth to him for blessing or for curse."

The Netherlands Government has never favoured missionary enterprise in its Eastern colonies, and so recently as 1903 there were only 35,000 nominally Christian natives in Java. The New Testament itself was deemed undesirable for native perusal, and Herr Brückner's translation into the native language was, according to Dr. Guillemard, destroyed by order of the authorities.

I. F. PALMER

To rest content with what has been done is to convert a stepping-stone into a couch.

## A Very Special Creation

[Period: Before the Primeval Slime. Scene: Olympus. Cast: The Three Persons of the Trinity.]

CACHINATION, peculiar and prolonged, proceeded from the Divine Workshop. Jesus, the Co-Eternal, busily engaged in preparing parables in his study, was disturbed. He rose and made his way to the Design Department from whence the noise proceeded. He found God in his easy chair, holding his hands to his sides. Perspiration was pouring from him. "Really, Papa!" said Jesus.

"Take a pew, my boy! I've just finished a good morning's work. Tell me what you think of this one." Jesus sat down, murmuring "But, why this mirth?" "Can't help it, my boy," came the response. "I'm preparing a rod in pickle for the Paragon of Animals. *The Paragon of Animals*. Ha, Ha!" The phrase seemed to tickle the old gentleman immensely, but it was evident that Jesus did not understand, for his face remained expressionless.

"Take a look at this, my boy." God placed something in his son's hand. "I cannot see anything, father." "Well, it is very small," said his parent. "But, take my word for it, it's something. And, if you will oblige by listening for a while, I think I may interest you."

God cleared his throat and then continued talking—in perfectly enunciated English.

"That microscopic object is an egg. I want you to imagine it careering down a house-drain into a public sewer, thence into an outfall-pipe eventually discharging into a river. That, or something similar to that, is what is going to happen to it on EARTH in days to come. A pike takes a gulp of water and, unknowingly, swallows the egg. Or, it may be that the egg catches on some weeds on the river's bank, and an ox or a pig eats them—with the egg. We will suppose that an ox is the lucky creature.

"The egg-shell is quickly dissolved in the juices of the stomach of the ox, and the liberated embryo immediately grips the stomach and settles down contentedly into its lodgings. Its shape changes into that of a plump bladder as thick as a bean. It grows another and more substantial shell. Inside the bladder, grows what *looks like* a little head on a little neck. There is no further development."

"But, father, I cannot yet see the reason for your amusement. You have made many funnier creatures than that. Think of the Praying Mantis, the Golden Gardener, the—"

"Patience, Joshua! Sit still, and listen a little longer. I have hardly begun yet. The little creature lives in the muscle of the ox; lives, but does not develop. Its time has not yet come. Then the day arrives, at length, when the ox is slaughtered. A beautiful piece of beef appears on the butcher's slab. Mrs. Brown sees it. She haggles with the butcher who eventually knocks off sevenpence of the ninepence he had overcharged, and Mrs. Brown bears it triumphantly home. No extra charge is made for the little special creation, for its presence is unsuspected by anyone.

"The Browns have a hearty meal on Sunday of the Roast Beef of Old England. It is Mr. John Brown who draws the bladder-worm. And then the fun begins." Amusement was again registered on the face of the Great Designer. A full minute passed by before he could continue.

"The bladder-worm, after long last, has attained its earthly destination. The stomach juices of Mr. Brown attack the hard shell and rapidly digest it.



They make an attempt to digest the little head and neck, but they cannot manage it. *I have seen to that.* That is *Design*, my boy. This little head and neck, which, up to now, had projected into the interior of the capsule, now neatly turns itself inside out and sets about exploring the small intestine. Here it finds the home I have, in my wisdom, provided for it. It is now a tapeworm. It attaches itself firmly to the intestine, and there it will remain, with the best of luck, for ten or a dozen years. And no bad judge! For I have manufactured its living quarters, and the Lord of Heaven and Earth is no jerry-builder.

"Our latest creation finds he has little to do. He is free from care. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards. (Take a note of that, Joshua!) But my little friend toils not, neither does he spin. (*And that!*) He has no stomach, no intestine. All he requires is fuel for his vital energy, and that fuel is simply absorbed from his host's breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner. The Paragon of Animals, on the other hand, misses his meals and waxes thinner and thinner.

"In such ideal surroundings there is no need to take thought for the morrow. Reproduction can now go on merrily without any fear of a wolf at the door. One thought only may disturb my little masterpiece. If his host dies, he, the tapeworm, dies with him. But not till then. So now he may merrily increase and multiply. From the hinder end of the little tape a new young creature shoots. It does not separate; it remains attached. Then another link is added to the chain, then another and another. These links have perfectly developed sexual organs, both male and female. The Love Game is afoot. Grand-Children, Great-Grand-Children, Great-Great-Grand-Children! And so *ad infinitum*. Well, not quite! We may achieve thirty-nine feet or so of Generation after Generation all crying Hail to the Lord. ("Praise ye the Lord," chirped the Co-eternal Dove, from his perch over their heads, "Praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and—") Shut up, Ghost!

"No, you see the process *cannot* go on for ever. There is not room enough. When the length gets too enormous, some of the later offspring or links, get detached. Each length has its fertilized ova. They pass into the drain, or elsewhere, and the cycle is completed. But only to start again." ("And so we go round the mulberry-bush," murmured the Dove.)

"I have devised this sport for the benefit of the Paragon of Animals. His Pride is colossal and needs humbling. I, even I, have looked upon the Tapeworm and pronounced it good. Look up my *Genesis*. I do not recollect any phrase of mine such as the 'Paragon of Animals.' Hee, Hee!"

"Tell me, father, for I am hazy on the point. How does it happen, considering the perils the fertic ovum has to go through, that it can be depended upon to get back into man's intestines?"

"An intelligent question, Joshua. The chances that such should happen are, I calculate, 190,000,000 to 1 against. I therefore take care that this *magnum opus* of mine holds its own by seeing to it that in the struggle for existence a tape-worm is capable of leaving 200,000,000 eggs."

"The Father knoweth all things. Still, one more question, Father," Jesus inquired, gravely. "Is man designed for the sake of the tape-worm or vice-versa? Which, in short, is the Paragon of Animals? Which creature have you more considered?"

A fluttering and spluttering from aloft. Water was sprinkled over the bench of the Great Artificer.

Birdseed was scattered over the workshop. "Ha, Ha, Ha!" came from above. The Ghost, it appeared, had a sense of humour, too.

T. H. ELSTON.

## Short Studies in Theology

THE Absent God. The following anecdote recently appeared in a popular religious weekly, which called to mind the words of the well-known song, "Call again to-morrow for I'm not at home to-day." It told of a lady who took her small son into an empty church, and in order to impress his mind with due solemnity, and the notion that the place whereon he stood was holy ground, said to him: This is the house of God. The little fellow stared round the vast, empty building, and a perplexed look came into his face. "Mummy," he suddenly exclaimed, "God isn't here to-day; let's go, and come back another day when He is at home." But it appears that God isn't always welcome in His own house. There is a story told of a coloured man who was very anxious to join a certain exclusive New York Church, but in view of the colour prejudice among his congregation the minister considered it wiser to put him off with an excuse. A few days later they met in the street, whereupon the darkie said: "Ah done prayed sah, and de Lord he done sent me an answer last night." "Indeed," said the minister, "and what did the Lord say," "Well sah, He done asked me what church ah wished to join, and ah told Him it was yourn." Den He says to me, "Ho, ho, dat church, you shure can't get in dere, ah know you can't, 'cause ah been trying to get in dat church myself for ten years, and ah couldn't." If He did manage to get in, He might sometimes hear some strange perversions of Holy Writ. A negro preacher, who had for many years concealed the fact that he had served a term in jail, mounted the pulpit one Sunday morning, when he saw, to his horror in one of the front pews, a man who had been in prison at the same time as himself. For a moment the preacher did some deep thinking, and then fixing his eye on his old-time companion, he said impressively, "Ah takes mah text dis mornin' from de sixty-fo' chapter and de fo' hundre'th verse ob de gospel ob St. John, where it says, Dem as sees me an' knows me and says nothin', dem will ah see later."

The war of the Creeds. A visitor going into an Irish cabin noticed a picture of the Pope, facing one of King William "of glorious memory." Asked the reason of this strange juxtaposition, the wife explained. "Shure me husband's an Orangeman and I'm a Catholic." "In that case how do you get on together?" asked the visitor. "Very well, except on the 12th of July, when he goes out with his Orange procession, comes home drunk, and always takes down the Pope and jumps on him, and then he goes to bed. Next morning I takes down King William and pawns him, and buys a new Pope with the money. Then I give the ould bhoy the ticket to get King William out."

Changing his species. An Irish priest once threatened an ignorant member of his flock, that if he got drunk again he would turn him into a rat. For a few days the man kept strictly sober, but one evening he returned home as drunk as ever. "Biddy," he said to his wife, "don't run away from me, I'm not going to bate ye. The priest said the next time I had the drink taken he would turn me into a rat. Biddy, mavourneen, look at me, and think of the days when we were first married, and when ye see me getting littler and littler, and the whiskers growing



out of me, and hair growin' all over me body, Biddy as ye love me, kape an eye on the cat."

The Day of Judgment. The pig belonging to Widow Murphy had mysteriously disappeared, and although Pat Ryan was strongly suspected of being able to elucidate the mystery, there was no direct evidence against him. In these circumstances the help of the priest was sought. Calling to see Pat, the cleric went straight to the root of the matter with the question, "Now, Pat, as your priest, answer me this question truthfully, Did you steal Widow Murphy's pig?" "I did, your Riverince," was the reply. "What have you done with it?" "Killed it and ate it." "Pat, Pat," said the priest solemnly, "What will you say on the Day of Judgment when you are brought face to face with the widow and the pig, and she accuses you of stealing it?" "Did you say the pig would be there?" asked Pat anxiously. "I did." "Well," said the culprit in a tone of great relief, "I'd say, Widow Murphy, there's your pig."

Baptismal Regeneration. On one occasion a New York Regiment was addressed by an evangelist, and at the close of his service he remarked to the colonel, "I addressed a Kansas regiment last week, and I was extremely pleased when, before I left the camp, eight men came forward and presented themselves for baptism." "Here adjutant," shouted the C.O., "detail ten men for baptism. I ain't going to have my regiment beaten in piety by any d— Kansas crowd."

The parish church of a large provincial town possessed two mission chapels at either end, known respectively as the North End Mission and the South End Mission. Giving out the notices one Sunday morning at the parish church, the rector announced, "There will be a service at the North End Mission at 3 p.m. this afternoon, and at the South End Mission at 4 p.m. Children will be baptized at both ends." One dear old lady, who had an intense dislike of Nonconformity of any kind was horrified to discover that the local Baptists had been using a pond in her grounds for adult baptism. "The very idea," she said, "of daring to baptize their converts in my grounds. I'll teach them to leave their sins in my pond."

Go to the ant, etc. A Scots minister who preaching in the open-air, had unfortunately taken his stand upon an ant-hill. It was not long before these little creatures began to make their presence felt. For some time the preacher bore the biting in silence, but at length, having reached a point where he could endure it no longer, he burst out with, "Brethren, I have the Word of God in my heart, but I think the de'il has gotten into my breeks."

The Book of Genesis. Being a fairly regular church attendant an Irish publican was given the privilege of reading the lesson. It was unfortunate, however, that on his first appearance in this capacity, he announced that he was about to read from the nineteenth chapter of Guinness's.

Undue Familiarity. A Protestant Evangelist was once preaching at an out-door service, and in the course of his remarks he had occasion to say that Paul did this or Peter did that. "Look here, guv'nor," said the Roman Catholic in the crowd, "don't be so d— familiar. If you can't call 'em saints, you might at least put 'mister' before their names."

Many readers will be familiar with the story of a gentleman in Wigan, who being anxious to secure a copy of Canon Farrar's book, *Seekers After God*, telephoned his bookseller to send him a copy at once. Shortly afterwards he received the message, "No seekers after God to be found in Wigan. Suggest you try Liverpool." Seekers after God are, however quite numerous in some parts of the earth. In a

life of St. Francis Xavier, written by a monk, the saint is credited with having converted ten thousand of them *on a desert island*.

A sudden conversion. Little Peter's mother coming suddenly into the nursery on a Sunday afternoon, discovered her small boy playing with his tin soldiers. "Why Peter," she said, "whatever do you mean by playing with your soldiers on Sunday?" "Oh, its all right, mother," was Peter's cheerful reply, "they're the Salvation Army."

"There are no wild beasts in Ireland now," wrote an Irish schoolboy, "except in the theological gardens."

JOSEPH BRYCE.

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## Acid Drops

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Methodists are naturally disturbed at the publication of Marjorie Bowen's *Wrestling Jacob, a Study of John Wesley*. The book is not a scientific study of Wesley; had it been so, the general tenor of it would have been still more objectionable to Methodists, and would have been deeply resented by Christians and religious people in general. Wesley's theology, as such, was crude, and embodied many of the most primitive superstitions. Miss Bowen stresses the fact that this influence on people, and particularly on children, was fundamentally bad, and must have done much to help fill lunatic asylums. But in this respect he was in line with "true Christianity," although much of the influence of Christianity in general has been counter-influenced by the humanity of professing Christians who were very often so much better than their creed. There were many complaints, not merely from the clergy of the Established Church, but from impartial observers, at the pathological character of many of Wesley's converts, and the unhealthy character of the conversions, but in this respect Miss Bowen confines herself to mere descriptions, and refrains from a scientific analysis of cases.

Socially, Wesley's influence, which was fully brought out in the early history of the movement, was largely anti-progressive. Energy that should have been spent in a better direction was exhausted in the desire to save souls, and in looking forward to repayment for submission here by enjoyment in heaven. And the fear of Hell, so prominent, so vital in early Methodism, can never do anything but degrade. But Wesley himself was a big man, with the qualities of intolerance, and hardness. Had he not had his religion, these qualities might have been toned down, and his sense of right—distorted by his religious beliefs—and of justice—deadened by his theology—and his humanity—coarsened by his belief in hell and original sin—might have been purified by an intelligent humanism. He had a genius for organization (a quality which some very bad men have had), and untiring energy in the pursuit of his ideals, again a quality of many men from Prime Ministers to professional gang-leaders and successful business men. The reformers of the period comprised in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century and the first thirty of the nineteenth century, found Wesley's influence anything but a good one. Miss Bowen's book is published at 15s. We hope to notice it at greater length in the near future.

The *Christian Herald* for November 11, declares there are 4,000 Atheist Sunday Schools in Canada. We believe the writer to be a liar, but we honestly wish he was not.

The *Daily Express*, we believe, guarantees that its advertisements are all "genuine." We presume that must mean that the advertisement is given in by some one who supplies what is advertised, because we note one of a "Joss stick," price 1s., from the burning of which one realizes one's desire. It all depends *what* they desire, and how one expects it to come. If one burnt a



joss-stick to get rain, or recover from a cold, or to pick out a winner in a coming horse-race, we haven't the least doubt but that No. 1 would get his desire sooner or later, and numbers two and three would most probably get theirs, if they had a little patience. After all the Christian Church owes a very large part of its income and pretty well all of its power to this kind of thing. There is nothing new under the sun, not even the practice of making money out of the ignorance of the general public.

The new councillors in Oban decided to have their "kirking" done in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. As they are all Protestants, this has caused great surprise, and very strong opposition from their own ministers. The reason for the proposed kirking seems to be because of the large proportion of Catholic ratepayers—and though it is not so hinted—perhaps such a concession to their religion might influence not a little next year's voting. In any case there is quite a holy row in Oban at the moment, and the Rev. M. Mackeracher has gone to Edinburgh to confer with officials of the Church of Scotland's law agents on the question. We think councillors ought to show their gratitude for being elected by worshipping anywhere the ratepayers want them to. The result as far as religion is concerned—and deities—would be exactly the same. After all, what is the precise difference between a Roman Catholic service and that of an African tribe with witch-doctors complete?

The *Daily Telegraph* does a public service in reporting what the Pope says to his Chinese Priests about the present Japanese invasion with all its attendant atrocities:—

He wished to correct the impression that his sympathies were with the Japanese in the present war; he had expressed no opinion about the conflict, but "the circular ended by remarking that it would be well to remember that the Japanese armies were fighting against Bolshevism."

This is Christianity indeed. "No opinion" about murderous ravin, but a condemnation of a political ideal!

A brilliant writer in the *British Weekly* explains that the word "eternal" is gravely misunderstood. Most people seem to think it means "eternal." But—says this writer—it really means "belonging to eternity." For instance, he adds, "time is part of eternity," and therefore, we presume the Cockney, saying "'arf a mo'" is referring to a part of eternity—even if it is only a small part of it.

The Amalgamated Press takes advantage of big advertising for a so-called "new" edition of the Bible. They have issued the first number of a "Serial" called *The Story of the Bible*. So far as we have seen, it is going to be a very poor re-hash of ancient and fish-like fundamentalist "proofs" of Bible historicity. The illustrations are well executed, but the "Book of Words" is shocking in the extreme to students and even school-boys. Perhaps the "gem" of the work lies in the "Testimonials," which must be a terrible disappointment to the publishers. King George V. safeguards his own praise with a "Perhaps." Earl Baldwin says, "The Bible is a high explosive; it works in strange ways." It is left to one of the Editors—Rev. Townley Lord—to say that in this publication we exchange "the coldly scientific for the romantic and the poetical." Well, they certainly drop the scientific truth for something else.

A booklet, described as "Dr. Norwood's searching new booklet," is entitled *Why a Revival?* with a sub-title: "God: A Sheer Necessity." We imagine that God—any God—is indeed a sheer necessity for all the myriads of paid preachers and their retinue. How else could they live? But we see no other necessity for any Deity. As G. W. Foote used to say: "Crowds of Christians live on the Cross who could never earn a living on the square."

We do not give a hoot for the ridiculous fuss being made on the very insignificant question of whether the B.B.C. is going to allow alcoholic refreshments to be praised or not over the Wireless. But we have no patience at all with the *Christian World* revelation:—

I think we may be fairly confident that a change of B.B.C. policy on this matter is not far distant, for it has come to my ears—in strict confidence, so I am unable to reveal his name—that one of the most influential and highly placed personages in the land, whom even the B.B.C. cannot afford to ignore, has intervened in such a way as is likely to lead to a thorough "clean-up" of the programmes.

To use expressions like "A Clean-up" in such a connexion is just a bit of Christian nastiness and nothing else.

"Be careful how you teach the Old Testament," says the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead. He was preaching about war—and the preacher is a pacifist. We sympathize with his predicament, but why not straightforwardly repudiate those sections of the Bible which advocate, inspire, justify and glorify war? What would you say of a teacher (in anything except religion) who constantly recommended a text-book, which while rarely expounding what you wanted to teach, was constantly found to commend the exact opposite? If you add that such a text-book had been for centuries the one and chief authority for condemning the view you wished to advocate as essential to civilization, what would anybody think of your consistency or even your sanity?

Roland Wild, author and traveller, has recently been investigating conditions in the United States, and, referring to the Middle West and West, writes:—

Five plagues, of flood, drought, insects, tornado and terrible cynicism and distrust, have struck them in the last few years.

Brought up as they were on the strict interpretation of the Bible, with strict parents and stricter school-masters, the old people are seeing a religious meaning in the disasters. The plagues, they say, are akin to the Old Testament plagues of Egypt. They listen to lay preachers who rant and storm through the cattle towns and plead with their audiences to repent before it is too late.

"Ye are doomed people!" shouted the tweed-clad preacher at us as we sat in the audience of a twice-nightly prayer meeting in Gallup, New Mexico. "You have brought upon yourselves the plagues of Egypt, and not one of you will escape!" The greybeards nodded their heads in agreement.

The grey-beards see quite plainly that none of these Acts of God would have happened had the virtues of their children been equal to their own. Let us hope, at least, that God will allow their grey hairs to go down to the grave in peace.

## Fifty Years Ago

THEN how is salvation secured? Through a vicarious sacrifice, which is an offence against reason and justice. A just God would neither impute to unborn generations the guilt of an ancestor, nor impute the righteousness of Jesus to an unrighteous world. The Redemption through Christ depends upon the Fall through Adam—a fallacy reposing on a fable. For who now believes in a literal Adam with a woman made from his rib, created in the image of God, yet unable to resist the first temptation, and damning all posterity through one act of disobedience? And what became of all those who lived before Christ suffered? Were they consigned to heaven or hell? And how was Christ a sacrifice when he was put to death for blasphemy? The doctrine that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" is a remnant of the grossest conceptions of barbarism. Yet the analogy between the "blood of goats and calves," with which the savage God of the Old Testament was propitiated, and the atoning "blood of Christ," is carefully elaborated in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

*The Freethinker*, November 27, 1887.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FOR Circulating and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—R. Thomas, 7s.

W. J. BRIGDEN.—Notice inserted.

CINE CERE.—It is a pity that men when they assume a public office do not display a fitting sense of self-respect, and also of duty to the whole of the people they represent. But Christianity generally manages to corrupt a man's sense of what is right in such circumstances.

H. A. MOUNTAIN (Manchester).—Thanks for copy of newspaper.

R. JONES.—Hope to meet you at the Birkenhead meeting. We shall not be speaking again in Liverpool before the autumn.

H. MURPHY.—Thanks for cuttings, but most of them are rather late in arrival.

T. OWEN.—Thanks for good wishes. The Rev. John Baptist Reeves must be a very ignorant kind of a man to say "there is no such thing as citizenship unless it is deeply-rooted in religion." Perhaps, it is not merely ignorance. It may be just "bounce."

T. H. JONES.—Tithes are very common in all parts of the world and in every age. Originally, one may assume they were offerings to a god, but the priesthood soon made it compulsory, although until modern times they carried with them certain duties and responsibilities. In England, in early times, the tithes were to be partly spent in helping the poor. But the Church managed to get rid of the responsibility and stick to the profits. The same took place with regard to land. Grants of land originally carried with it certain rights, one of which was to supply soldiers in time of war. With the formation of a standing army, the privileges of land were retained, and the entire cost of the army shifted on to the nation.

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.

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

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.

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

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.

## Sugar Plums

To-day (Sunday, November 28), Mr. Cohen will speak in the Town Hall, Gateshead-on-Tyne, at 7 o'clock, on "Must we have a Religion." A good muster of friends from the surrounding district is expected, and we advise those who wish to make certain of a seat to be at the hall in good time. Doors open at 6.30.

On December 6, Mr. Cohen will speak in the Birkenhead Town Hall, Hamilton Square, at 8 o'clock, on "Can Christianity Survive?" This is a Monday evening lecture, as the Town Hall is not available for Sunday meetings. The Birkenhead authorities do not care for any competition with the Churches on Sunday. That is at least a compliment to the power of Freethought.

We briefly mentioned a few weeks ago that the Edinburgh authorities had issued a summons against Mr. Whitehead for selling Freethought literature at one of his open-air meetings. The case raised some very important questions, and came on for hearing on October 26, and was then adjourned until November 30. The other day notice was given to the Society's solicitor, that the Procurator Fiscal was not proceeding with the charge, and it would be withdrawn. We have not space this week to deal with the matter, but will deal with it in the next issue of the *Freethinker*.

A very useful pamphlet, *The Spanish Church and Politics*, by John Langdon-Davies, has just been issued by Watts and Co., price one penny. The author has travelled in Spain during the war, and is in no doubt as to the activities of the Spanish Church in denouncing as "mortal sin," any help given to a "liberal" government. Here is a quotation from an official Catholic criticism:—

Q. Is there no grade of Liberalism that may be Catholic?

A. That is what its partisans claim, but the Church teaches that what is called Catholic Liberalism is not Catholic.

Q. Then whoever is Liberal in politics sins?

A. Certainly, because in a Liberal there exists the Liberalism which the Church condemns.

Q. And if by "Liberal" is understood something not condemned by the Pope?

A. Then he sins himself in calling himself Liberal, knowing that the Pope condemns all Liberalism.

The Roman Church would not dare openly to publish such teaching in this country. It has one public teaching here and another public teaching elsewhere. But the damnable character of the teaching of the "Great Lying Church" is the same all over the world.

Birkenhead and Manchester will be visited by London speakers to-day (November 28), Mr. G. Bedborough will speak in the Beecherroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead, at 7 p.m., on "Christ and Today," and Mr. R. H. Rosetti speaks for the Manchester Branch in the Kings Cafe, Oxford Road, on "A Search for God"; also at 7 p.m. A large and intelligent audience constitutes the best welcome for a London speaker, and in both cases the local saints can be relied upon to work hard to ensure the success of the meetings along those lines.

*This England* (the title of a reprint of queer 1937 ideas, culled from various newspapers in 1937), gives on its first page the quaint idiocy of the Rev. Robert Irons, vicar of St. Paul's, Shanklin, Isle of Wight. This cleric describes the modern cult of the human body as "a modern mania and the cause of the present world-wide dementia, the orgy of lust and passion for killing." But after all, this stupid exaggeration is some slight improvement on the older clerical theory that all the ills of mankind are the result of a Divine Vengeance on unbelievers and Sabbath-breakers. The clergy, by the way, share with Colonel Blimp, the major portion of this interesting reprint. Even the famous Colonel himself owes most of his charm to his religious orthodoxy. There is a whole section devoted to "The Religion of the English." We congratulate the *New Statesman and Nation* on so valuable a record of contemporary nonsense.



## Thomas Scott's "English Life of Jesus"

### I.

It is admitted even by Christians that there are no materials for a real biography of their deity. In spite of the extravagant praise bestowed on the Gospels it is only possible to construct one from these records by the use of a lively imagination and plenty of "suppositions." This, at least, is the case in perhaps the most popular "life" ever written—that of Ernest Renan. Strauss' *Life of Jesus* is a far heavier performance, and consists mostly of a minute examination of the Gospel narratives and their mythical elements. In English there is Evan Powell Meredith's *Prophet of Nazareth*, which, though discussing Jesus as an historical personage, really is a most devastating attack on his ethics. It is a great pity that Meredith's work has never been reprinted, for it certainly holds an unique position in Freethought literature. In these days, when the "deity" of Jesus is not too much insisted upon, what "Our Lord" is supposed to have said forms the basis of most of the sermons of to-day. Meredith's work provides a very healthy antidote to them; his drastic analysis of the "teachings" of Jesus, and his contemptuous rejection of the greater part, make his book of greater value now than when it appeared over seventy years ago.

Thomas Scott's *English Life of Jesus*, which surely should hold high rank among the comparatively few "lives" written by Freethinkers, appeared first in pamphlet form, commencing in 1866 with the *Credibility of the Gospel Narratives*, an examination of the birth and infancy of Jesus. It was one of a number of pamphlets sent out by the author from Ramsgate (and subsequently London), which must have had enormous influence in a quiet way in disintegrating the belief in Christianity among the middle classes of the later Victorian era.

Scott himself was a remarkable man. Born in 1808, he had a very varied and full life before settling down as a producer of Liberal Freethought works. He had even been a page in the court of Charles X. in France; and afterwards had travelled widely. He was, as Mrs. Besant, in her *Autobiographical Sketches*, says, "a mighty hunter" though not "before the Lord"; and he lived for some time among the North American Indians, sharing the hardships of their wild life."

Scott eventually married and settled down; and from his private addresses he began to send out a vast number of heretical tracts. They were by no means Atheistical, for Scott never seems to have shed some belief in a Deity. But he was completely tolerant and broadminded, and his contributors were evidently given a free hand. These tracts and pamphlets must have had a great circulation and enormous influence. They reached those people who were, during the '60's and '70's of last century, the great church-goers, and the backbone of Protestant Christianity. Extreme though some of the pamphlets were, they never seemed to go the whole way with us; rather were they written as if the attack was only, or mostly, against the cruder beliefs and superstitions of Christianity. Many of them were, as a matter of fact, written by benighted clergymen far more theistic than Scott himself. In spite of that, however, the whole series was a noble one; and though some of the subjects they dealt with are out of date, they can still be read with profit. On the other hand, a few of the pamphlets are as fresh today as when they were written, and would prove ex-

remely interesting even to the more or less impatient Freethinker who wants to cut the (Victorian) cackle and get on with the job.

Scott was as generous as he was broadminded. Mrs. Besant says:—

His correspondence was world-wide and came from all classes—now a letter from a Prime Minister, now one from a blacksmith. All were equally welcome, and all were answered with equal courtesy. At his house one met people of the most varying opinions. Colenso, Edward Maitland, E. Vansittart Neale, Charles Bray, Sara Hennell, W. J. Birch, R. Suffield, and hundreds more, clerics and laymen, scholars and thinkers, all gathered in this one home, to which the right of *entrée* was gained only by love of Truth and desire to spread freedom among men. Mr. Scott devoted his fortune to this great work. He would never let publishers have his pamphlets in the ordinary way of trade, but issued them all himself, and distributed them [mostly] gratuitously. . . . In all he was nobly seconded by his wife, a sweet, strong, gentle, noble woman.

J. M. Wheeler and John M. Robertson give the highest praise to Scott and his work, and it seems a great pity both are in such danger of being forgotten. Readers who are interested should make a point of looking out for the second-hand copies, which can often be picked up cheaply. Many of them are bound up in volumes; but singly or in volume form Scott's pamphlets are always worth reading.

Whether he contributed anything else to his series but his *English Life of Jesus* I do not know. All the pamphlets on this subject were eventually bound together and thus appeared in 1871; but a much abbreviated and revised edition came out in 1872. In this—and in the pamphlets also—Scott is supposed to have had the help of the Rev. Sir G. W. Cox, the biographer of Colenso, whose heretical views Cox must have shared. Indeed, it is possible Cox was quite as heretical as the Rev. Dr. Giles and the Rev. E. C. Brewer. Giles' *Hebrew and Christian Records* is packed with Freethought thinly veiled; while Brewer is suspected of being the anonymous "Julian," the author of some trenchant heretical tracts published towards the close of last century.

Scott was encouraged to prepare a new edition of his *English Life of Jesus* by Bishop Hinds, the ex-Bishop of Norwich, who subscribed for ten copies in advance. Francis Newman, the famous Cardinal's less-known brother (the author of *Phases of Faith*, and other Theistical works), was also most encouraging to Scott. The book, says F. W. Newman, "has the great excellence of common sense, displayed in always refusing to undertake building a house without the needful materials. When you have shown that a current story is unworthy of belief, you stoutly refuse the very unreasonable demand, so lightly and so generally made, that you shall replace the fiction by some true history." Newman and Scott, of course, never went so far as to deny the historicity of Jesus. They believed that some such man lived, but that his story was lost in the myths and legends which later Christians invented about him. Scott's work consisted in showing that the various narratives related in the Bible could not possibly have any basis of fact; and, in particular, he subjected the fourth Gospel to a very clever analysis. It was obvious to him that if it were really true, then the three Synoptics must be false, a position which had been taken up by many writers before him. Still, he brought a freshness of outlook to the problem as well as a keen intellect, which makes his *English Life of Jesus* still worth reading and studying. It should never have been let fall into oblivion.

H. CUTNER.



## The Poison of Poetry

(Concluded from page 740)

The limitations imposed by rhythm are increased when, as in the case of most poetry, we add the further limitations imposed by *persistently regular* rhythmic forms and by *rhyme*. The simple fact that the free choice of the most suitable words to express our meaning hardly ever results naturally in rhythm, and still less often in rhyme, proves that the introduction of these factors must constitute a definite handicap to the free and most appropriate expression of ideas. *When found in combination, rhythm and rhyme form a double handicap to the most important function of language.*

It may be well, at this point, to deal with an argument that has been put forward in favour of poetry which arises out of the admitted difficulties presented by this double handicap. "You must confess," a critic once said, "that it requires a more clever brain than yours or mine to express ideas in poetry." My answer to this was: "It requires a more clever brain than yours or mine to perform the confidence trick successfully, or to invent a new poison gas." The point I wished to emphasize was that mere difficulty in performance did not necessarily enhance the value or merit of the thing performed. Many a clever brain has used its cleverness to produce things that are in no way beneficial to humanity. To argue in favour of a practice on the grounds that it is difficult to carry out successfully is another fallacy akin to those previously mentioned.

How is it, then, that so much kudos has been attached to poetry as a form of linguistic expression? There are several answers to this question. First, there is the admiration of cleverness which is blind to the nature and effects of the clever things produced. Second, there is the approval called forth as a result of the so-called "æsthetic" pleasures derived from rhythm and rhyme. Third, there is the liking evinced by primitive mentalities for forms of words that can easily be remembered, irrespective of the logical sense or truth of such words. This is a natural relic from those illiterate times before writing and reading became commonplaces, when knowledge (such as it was) had to be handed on by word of mouth, and mnemonics were correspondingly valuable. And, lastly, there is that vague sense of satisfaction or uplift, almost drug-like in its symptoms, which lovers of poetry derive from the combination of aural pleasure with a meaning that is emotional and not wholly intelligible, and which is therefore somewhat mysterious. There is a pronounced similarity between this vague sense of uplift and the feeling of "goodness" experienced by worshippers who have just emerged from a typical mumbo-jumbo church service.

When all these considerations are taken *en masse*, is it surprising that poetry should have acquired, in the minds of the unthinking majority, that high status which is still claimed on its behalf? Taken separately, not one of these factors can be adduced as a genuine argument in support of the value of that particular form of language. And the last-named is, in my opinion, enough by itself to condemn poetry as a harmful influence upon the mind.

In support of my contention that a large amount of poetry is not wholly intelligible, and is therefore not intelligent, one may instance the lavish use of metaphor and simile. I have already indicated at length the dangers to reason and right thinking which these forms of speech present; so, to avoid needless reiteration, I must refer readers to two earlier articles of mine on the subject, entitled "The Dangers of An-

alogy," and "The Literal and the Metaphorical." By such means as these, as well as by the use of emotional and ambiguous terminology, the poet succeeds in exciting or drugging, and often deceiving, the intellect. (See also my article on "Emotion in Language," in which the following sentences occur. "The more ignorant we are, the more easily can we be influenced by appeals to our emotions rather than to our reason," and "Emotional language is found to be least in evidence in the writings and utterances of those who are nowadays looked upon as the most learned and reliable persons—the scientists," and "The relationship between reliable accuracy and the absence of emotion is one that is recognized by most people when dealing with matters that can be verified. When it is ignored, it is usually to the detriment of truth.")

While on the subject of this aspect of poetry, I cannot refrain from quoting some remarks by H. L. Mencken in his book *Selected Prejudices*. After declaring that nine-tenths of the best poetry "has been written by poets less than thirty years old, and a great deal more than half by poets under twenty-five," he writes as follows:—

In brief, poetry is a comforting piece of fiction set to more or less lascivious music—a slap on the back in waltz time—a grand release of longings and repressions to the tune of flutes, harps, sackbuts, psalteries and the usual strings. . . . On the precise nature of this beautiful balderdash you can get all the information you need by opening at random the nearest book of verse. The ideas you will find in it may be divided into two main divisions. The first consists of denials of objective facts; the second of denials of subjective facts. Specimen of the first sort:—

God's in his heaven.  
All's right with the world.

Specimen of the second:—

I am master of my fate.  
I am the captain of my soul.

It is my contention that all poetry (forgetting, for the moment, its possible merit as mere sound) may be resolved into either one or the other of these frightful imbecilities—that its essential character lies in the bold flouting of what every reflective adult knows to be the truth.

Without endorsing Mencken's sweeping condemnation in its entirety, I am of opinion that it is largely justifiable. Fortunately the taste for bursting into poetic language in support of one's arguments is gradually dying out. This habit is nothing more than a glorified version of the "slogan" habit, whereby the brainless stock their minds with ready-made catchwords and phrases so as to avoid the trouble of thinking for themselves. Persons who bespatter their conversation with gems from Longfellow or Byron are no longer looked up to as founts of wisdom. And, in addition to this, the growing realization that most poetry is nothing but highfalutin' rubbish is gradually reducing the "art" of poesy to the ranks of an infantile hobby.

The relatively small number of persons who to-day have the time or the inclination to read poetry renders its cumulative influence for harm almost negligible. Yet I believe it is still true that children in school are often made to learn it, on the mistaken assumption that it trains the memory. (As though memory were a muscle that thrives upon toughening exercises!) Our educational authorities, however, are still much under the influence of antiquated ideas and, like many of the older generations of laymen, they continue to labour under the delusion that poetry, because it is poetry, must therefore be a superior kind of literature. The day when poetry is



regarded by the majority as a bar to intellectual progress will be a day when humanity has taken another definite step in its march towards better things.

In conclusion, and by way of illustration, I feel bound to quote the following poem from the book *Selected Poems*, by Ezra Pound. The title of the poem is *Papyrus*, and here are the words:—

“Spring . . .  
Too long . . .  
Gongula . . .”

And I will take leave of my readers with this conundrum: Is it, or isn't it?

C. S. FRASER.

### Only Resistance Counts

SINCE a hooligan of the upper classes recently got a clout on the head from a stone thrown by a hooligan of the lower classes, there has been much talk of the “mob's” threat to liberty in this fair land of ours.

Watchdogs of liberty may have slumbered contentedly, or strolled complacently round the backyard confines of their belief in the eternal safety and sanctity of English liberties, while violence, tyranny and brutality crushed and trampled freedom underfoot in Fascist and Communist regimes abroad; while imitation swashbucklers in this country enjoyed their little reign of terror at public meetings, and strode triumphant over the opposition of youths and women; while the Western “democracies” (now preparing to fight wars to keep their grab-hold on other people's territories) banded together to stop rebellion-ridden Spain from using her liberty to the full in defence of her own liberties and her own democracy—yet even these somnolent watchdogs have now awakened with a great roar and a showing of teeth to denounce a “mob” which throws stones at a gentleman who can afford decent clothes, or builds barricades against the advance of a hated enemy which threatens their liberties.

Even some Secularist speakers who, rightly, denounce Fascism and Communism alike as enemies of Free-thought and of social democracy, yet go out of their way to give Communism just the little harder knock.

It would seem almost as though violence in an old school-tie is not really quite violence at all; at any rate, not on the same level as violence in a muffler. (No, by gad.) While, on the other side, exactly opposite, stands that other class, which considers that bullies and cowards in old school-ties are bullies and cowards, while in mufflers they are heroes in mufti.

And as one sees many Freethinkers drawn into one or the other of these classes, one sighs for reason that has fled, and liberty that languishes.

The Freethinker as a libertarian opposes both Fascism and Communism; he enters the lists against all dictatorships, all liberticides. He should oppose, too, all those forms of distortions of democracy which themselves oppose social liberty in the fullest practical sense.

The thorough libertarian (political considerations apart) will look closely into the practical structure of different social systems, as well as the principles they profess; and where he finds that the “means of production, distribution and exchange” are controlled, in fact, if not in theory, by the minority rather than by the majority, then he will say that no real and ultimate liberty can be claimed for such a system, and to that extent he will oppose the system, even though it is a democracy, and in other ways democratic. Where he finds that the means of production, distribution and exchange are controlled by the whole or the majority rather than by the minority, he will say that this is a factor in real and ultimate liberty, whatever other faults the system of which it is a part may hold; and so, to the degree of this liberty, will he support that system, even though it bears the name of Communism.

But for England the question we are being called upon to face is not Communism, but Fascism. Communism is unlikely; it is the advent of Fascism which is the more probable danger. Economic conditions are more in

favour of it; the people are psychologically more prepared for it; and the political movement of the British masses rides the delightful paradox of being an almost insurmountable barrier to workers' Communism, and an almost negligible opposition to capitalists' Fascism.

It is, then, Fascism we have to meet. And the quarrel is, How? Fascism is a liberticide; moreover, a frank liberticide. It is opposed to liberty, to liberty of thought, of conscience, of the individual. Once established here, it would destroy what liberties we have, as such liberties have been destroyed elsewhere. Therefore, say some of its opponents, fight it with its own weapons; smash its power before it gets a chance to smash ours. However regretfully, the libertarian must say no to this appeal to primitive passions and illusory garb of logic.

Actual violence, of course, must be met with defence, and any move by Fascism to seize power by violent methods must find a greater strength prepared against it. But it has not come to that.

It is a question of whether Fascism has a right to free speech. And whatever the nature of Fascism, to that question there is only one possible answer. Stone-throwing, violence, repression, refusal of meeting halls and places, these are not the ways to meet the threat of Fascism. These are the methods against which progress, Free-thought, liberty itself, have had to fight; but they are not the methods by which liberty will either save or consolidate itself, involving as they do a denial of liberty's very principle.

The Freethinker will not readily adopt against even Fascism those arguments and methods against which his own movement has had to battle for its right to be heard. He will not make the mistake his opponents have made of setting themselves up as the supreme, unquestionable, sacrosanct judges of whether a particular liberty is desirable or undesirable.

But Fascism is so provocative, complain some. Of course it is. But is that any reason, any excuse, for repressive measures? Could anything be more provocative than Free-thought propaganda and Free-thought methods to some types of Christians? Or than some brands of Socialism to vested interests? It is the very point on which Free-thought has had to fight its biggest battle—the right to be provocative.

Jesuit Father Woodlock has recently been telling us that we ought to have a Press censorship, because our newspapers, especially our newspaper cartoonists, are provocative, because they gibe at Hitler and Mussolini and may thus endanger world peace. Does provocation here in any way justify the repression that Father Woodlock would impose? Again, the Catholic Church itself is as much a liberticide as Fascism; but does any Freethinker suggest that the Catholic Church should not enjoy the same liberties as other churches in this country? Democracy must remain true to its own principles, to its own liberties, its own rights. Else it perishes, not by conquest, but by its own hand.

Liberty, after all, finds its greatest value, its strongest test, in generosity. What tests, and proves, our doctrine of toleration is not the liberty we grant to an opponent we do not fear, but the liberty we are prepared to grant to our strongest opponents, the opponents from whom we do have something to fear.

They who would seek to defend liberty and democracy, not in open contest on a fair field, but by physical and intellectual violence, by legislative repression and sly tyrannies, act not in the spirit of liberty, but in the spirit of that same liberticide against which they contend.

Fascism, like every other theory and movement in a democratic country, must be allowed to enjoy the fundamental right of democracy, of free speech and fair play. It has a right to speak to the British public, and by its propaganda to gain a majority following if it can. The British public, equally, have a right to hear Fascism if they want to, and to adopt it if they wish.

The spirit of liberty is still the spirit of Voltaire, “I disagree with every word you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it,” even when it means saying to the Fascist, “I will defend to the death your liberty to try to destroy my liberty.” Few of us, if strenuously tested, would be able to follow such a doc-



trine to its limit, but at least we can accept its guidance to the utmost of our capacity and ability.

And that not merely as a sentimentality. Not as a kind of heroic gesture of nailing the proud tattered flag of democracy to the mast of the sinking ship, but as a proved and practical doctrine. These principles of democracy have been proved in practice, and that is their strength. For however dark the days into which they enter, they will emerge again, and they will emerge clearer, stronger, more challenging. So fascism, too, whatever triumphs it enjoys in its hour—and there is much good that both Fascism and Communism have achieved—has proved itself in practice, and will prove itself again, as undesirable. Its own success in reaching power is, if not the measure, at least the prophecy of its subsequent failure. Experience, practice, is, in the end, the only testing-ground. And liberty the only guide.

But let not the liberty one grants to Fascism take one jot or tittle from one's utmost, passionate, legitimate opposition to the menace of Fascism. Let us rather intensify the fight against this loathsome enemy of liberty. Let our opposition, by its very enlightenment, be the more penetrating, the more persistent, the more uncompromising.

Fascism, with its primitive passions and poses, has an easier field to work upon, it is true, among the primitive minds of masses already familiarized with at least some forms of slavery. But at the same time there is a tremendous number of people in this country in whom the light of liberty and reason burns, if only faintly, and in whom the call of freedom and sanity may kindle such a fire of enthusiasm that shall make the spirit of liberty for ever safe among us.

"There is no slavery but ignorance," said Ingersoll. "And there is no escape but intellectual development. Liberty is the child of intelligence. . . . I cannot dream of the victories yet to be won upon the fields of thought; but I do know that, coming from the infinite sea of the future, there will never touch this 'bank and shoal of time,' a richer gift, a rarer blessing, than liberty for man, for woman, and for child."

And was it not Paine who looked coldly upon Burke's tears for the sufferings of the aristocrats in the French Revolution, and bitterly retorted, "Mr. Burke pities the plumage but forgets the dying bird"?

Grant Fascists their rightful liberty, by all means, but do not forget to fight them at the same time, do not neglect the defence of that hard-won liberty which you give them, but which they would destroy. Pity the plumage if you want to, but for Heaven's sake don't forget the bird. Remember at all times that after liberty there is only one thing that matters in this battle against the liberticides—only resistance counts.

RONALD STANDEAST.

## Christianity and Morals

CHRISTIAN: "If we abandoned the Christian religion, as Russia has done, I believe it would lead to our downfall. It seems to me that morality and good citizenship cannot exist apart from a belief in God."

Sceptic: "I do not agree. Allowing that much of a morally admirable character is associated with the Christian religion, as with all the other great religions, you must not overlook the other side of the picture. Its indifference to war and the honouring of our international obligations, the religious persecutions and strife in the past and the intolerance and bigotry prevalent at the present time more than offset any good standing to the credit of Christianity."

C.: "But do you not think that if religion were eliminated from our lives, it would act as an impetus to immoral conduct?"

S.: "Certainly not. We are members of a civilized society, and the vast majority of normal individuals behave as such. We are under the influence of the law and public opinion, factors of considerable importance in moulding conduct, and apart from our

natural inclination to be honourable, just and charitable, we know from accumulated experience that moral conduct is conducive to the happiness of the community. The abandonment of religion is unlikely to influence a perception so deeply rooted in our minds that it may be said to be a component part of our instinct of self-preservation."

C.: "Are not the best citizens in this country found among those who attend regularly a place of worship?"

S.: "No. The vast majority of people who attend Church do so because it is fashionable. They have no vital religious belief, and in no respect can they be considered better citizens than their non-churchgoing neighbours."

C.: "My experience teaches me that pious people are more reliable and more law-abiding than those who are indifferent to religion."

S.: "Your experience conflicts with my own. During a long life I have noticed that, generally speaking, the more pious individuals appear, the less reliance can be placed on their integrity. One has only to read the police proceedings recorded in the newspapers to realize the large number of people prominently connected with religion who misconduct themselves."

C.: "These are merely the black sheep which are found in most flocks. Presumably you will admit that crime always diminishes coincident with every religious revival in this country."

S.: "While it may be true that a comparatively few emotional and unstable individuals mend their ways, under the influence of a revival, they generally return to their old habits after a brief period of piety. In the past fifty years there has been a marked decline in religion in this country, yet during this period crime has steadily diminished with, of course, a corresponding increase in good citizenship. This established fact lends no support to your contention."

C.: "What is your opinion of the Christian missions abroad? Do you not think that a converted Heathen is a more trustworthy individual than his unconverted brother?"

S.: "I do not. On the contrary, speaking with several years experience of the Indian convert, I maintain he is the reverse. When I lived in India, many European families would not employ a native Christian servant if they could secure a heathen Hindu or a Mohametan. The servant class converts in India are recruited from low class ignorant natives, who, upon conversion, appear to acquire all the vices, but none of the virtues of their Christian employers. I learn from people who have lived in South Africa, that the Christian "boy" there is no different in this respect from his Hindu prototype. You have probably heard the term "Rice Christian," and are aware of the contempt which it expresses."

C.: "I have one more question to ask. Is it not true that since Russia abandoned God the morality of the people there has deteriorated?"

S.: "I do not think so. Whatever criticism can be justly made of the Russian regime there is no doubt of the measures the Russians are taking to improve their education, health and housing conditions. They are making great cultural efforts in these directions, and find their modern and robust Trinity much superior as an instrument for improving their health, happiness, and prosperity than the out of date and effete Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. An eminent churchman has said, 'No man to-day can make a fortune in Russia out of his fellow-men. I see a great classless society with no bias of class or race or colour.' Is this your idea of moral deterioration?"

PRO REASON.



## Correspondence

### NON-RESISTANCE AND THE EARLY CHURCH

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—Historical origins have very little to do with the matter which is in dispute between us. I believe there was a historical Christ; you don't; but you have no more right to say that I am superstitious for believing it than I have to call you superstitious for not believing it.

The main point is that the Christian ethic came into existence from the beginning of the Christian era, and after the third century the Christian Church ratted, and went contrary to the teachings of one whom it holds to be divine and infallible. My job is to try and convince Christians that they are utterly false to the teaching which they claim has a divine origin, and have therefore no right to call themselves Christians while they reject it. You say, "Mr. Housman admits that the teaching is not Christian." He admits no such thing. He claims that it is essentially Christian, but that the Church has rejected it.

Christ developed that teaching far further than did Socrates. The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest exposition I know of the doctrine of unilateral goodness as the key to man's salvation in this life, whether there be a future life or not.

I did not say that the early church made non-resistance a dogma. I only said that, as a matter of fact, the early Christians did not resist the exterminating efforts of the strongest secular power of that day, yet managed to survive. I have no concern with supernatural explanations for that fact. I only claim that, if Christians could do it then, they could do it now, and that they are in sufficient numbers to-day to be able, if they were faithful to the teaching of their Founder, to control the course of politics in the direction of constructive peace, and that they have, in fact, the power to save the world from catastrophe; but have not the faith and courage to do so.

It is utterly untrue to say that, in so trying to convince them of hypocrisy and cowardice, I am giving any support whatsoever to superstition. I am only out to show the superstitious ones that they have deserted their Founder.

That you entirely ignore the evidence in the writings of Origen and others, of the profound sense of the incompatibility of war with the Christian ethic, which existed in the early centuries of Christianity, is only a side matter. But here from the very heart of the superstitious Middle Ages is an indisputable fact; the Tertiaries of St. Francis, in the century following his death, claimed exemption from military service in loyalty to the founder: and though they were not reckoned a "religious" body in the ecclesiastical sense, the Pope supported their claim.

St. Francis of Assisi preached against all war, and was not condemned for it, as the Bishops of London and Gloucester have recently condemned Dick Sheppard and his following—one calling us heretics and the other blasphemous. If you had taken the trouble to find out how much I am attacking present-day "Christianity," I do not think you would have attacked me as you have done, calling me a supporter of superstition.

LAWRENCE HOUSMAN.

[On the whole I must refer readers back to my two articles of October 24 and November 7, for a reminder of what I actually did say and imply.

(1) I do not understand what is meant by a teaching being "essentially Christian" if that teaching can be found prior to Christianity, and apart from Christianity.

(2) I do not know what is meant by the statement that the early Christians "did not resist the exterminating efforts of the strongest secular power of that day." Naturally, a sect at its beginning cannot be expected to take up arms or to resist by massed force. But Christians did resist so soon as they could. (There is very slight evidence for the statement that the early Christians were faced with an "exterminating campaign.")

(3) I did not say, nor did I infer, that Mr. Housman consciously gave help to superstition, but only that by his

praise of Christian teaching (undeserved praise, I believe) he was strengthening the hands of those who were preaching a religion in which he did not believe. And I said this because I am acquainted with his attacks on present-day Christianity.

(4) I did not say that there were not to be found individual Christians who were against war. I was concerned with the attitude of the Christian Church and with Christians as a body. Mr. Housman's illustration in his penultimate paragraph bears out what I said. The Tertiaries of St. Francis claimed exemption from military service because they belonged to a specific religious group. They did not make the claim on the ground of their being Christians, or believers in Jesus.—C.C.]

### FREETHINKERS CLUB AND INSTITUTE

SIR,—The Board of Directors desire to thank the readers of the *Freethinker* for their enquiries regarding The Freethinker's Club, now in course of formation. As the amount subscribed to date is insufficient to meet requirements, in the matter of suitable premises, etc., the Directors hope that a more favourable financial response will be forthcoming to enable them to proceed with the project without further delay.

Information regarding the Club's progress will be supplied on request.

R. WORTLEY,  
Hon. Sec.

[Several letters have been held over till next week.]

### National Secular Society

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD NOVEMBER 18, 1937

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

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Bryant, Preece, Seibert, Elstob, Ebury, Silvester, Tuson, Wood, Redborough, Mrs. Quinton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Monthly Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Glasgow, Swansea, South London, and West London Branches. Concerning the Edinburgh case, adjourned from the previous hearing to November 30, the President read a letter from the Society's solicitors in charge of the case, giving the information that the Prosecution had withdrawn from further proceedings. The President reported the court proceedings of October 26, at which he was called upon as a witness.

Correspondence from Birmingham and London districts were dealt with, and the Secretary instructed. The Secretary presented a report of the Social and Dance held at the Bishopsgate Institute, and details in connexion with the Annual Dinner were discussed. The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, December 16, and the meeting closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,  
General Secretary.

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

#### LONDON

##### OUTDOOR

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place): 7.30, Saturday night and Sunday night, Mr. J. W. Barker will speak at each meeting.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond- Hampstead): 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.0, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes, Tuson and Miss E. Millard, M.A.

##### INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH (Alexandra Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4): 7.30, Mr. A. Burrall—"Education and Politics."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"Twenty-five Years of South Place."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Archibald Robertson—"Right and Left in Religion and Politics."

(Continued on page 767)



REMAINDER

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(Continued from page 766)

COUNTRY

OUTDOOR

NEWCASTLE (Bigg Market) : 8.0, Friday, November 26, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

INDOOR.

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane) : 7.0, G. Bedborough (London : N.S.S. Executive)—"Christ and To-day."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Schools) : 7.0, Short Address followed by Russian film "Turksil," featuring the making of a railway over 2,000 miles of desert, mountains, rivers, torrents; from ice chill to blistering heat.

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Forum, Albion Court, Kirkgate) : 7.45, Parliament Night.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley) : 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Ancient and Modern."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow) : 7.0, Mr. John Grant—"Materialism and Science."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate) : 6.30, Prof. J. Lavrin (Nottingham University)—"The Problems of Central Europe."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, Islington Liverpool, entrance in Christian Street) : 7.0, G. Halliday (Liverpool)—"Democracy's Ebb and Flow."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. ("King's Café," Oxford Road) : Mr. R. H. Rosetti (Gen. Sec., N.S.S.)—"A Search for God."

MIDDLESBROUGH (Carlton Hall) : 7.0, Wednesday, December 1, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Education in Error?"

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. (The Town Hall, Gateshead) : 7.0, Chapman Cohen—"Must we Have a Religion?" Admission free. Reserved seats 6d. each.

NORTH SHIELDS (Lord Nelson) : 7.0, Tuesday, November 30, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH (General and Municipal Workers' Rooms, Ferry Street) : 7.0, Thursday, November 25, A Branch Meeting.

JOB OR PART-TIME WORK (e.g., Articles).—28 years of age; 4 years with Chartered Accountants; 6 years studying and propagating re economic and social problems, International Affairs, League of Nations and its International Labour Organization, etc. Activities: speaking, interviewing, letters to press, organizing, canvassing, etc.—W. J. BRIDGEN, 232 Sellincourt Road, S.W.17.

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