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FREETHINKER

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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>The Nemesis of Christianity—The Editor</i> - - -	97
<i>Chelmsford's Cackle—Minnernus</i> - - -	99
<i>Literature and Dogma—T. H. Elstob</i> - - -	100
<i>Nature Notes of a Freethinker—Nicholas Mere</i> - - -	101
<i>Defenders of the Faith—Ignotus</i> - - -	106
<i>The World Union of Freethinkers—H. Cutner</i> - - -	107
<i>Is the Cinema Demoralizing?—J. Effel</i> - - -	107
<i>Practical Joke of a Planetoid—W. C. Scully</i> - - -	108
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions

The Nemesis of Christianity

No religion has talked more about morality than has Christianity; and no religion has done more to create and maintain an unhealthy view of life. For the Christian Church had no interest in "morals" as a distinct branch of social science. This was to be found amongst both the Greeks and the Romans, but it was foreign to the Christian Church. When a Greek philosopher talked of morality he thought of a branch of social life. When a Church leader used the same term he meant something entirely different. To him "right" conduct had little or no essential connexion with what the world now understands by morality. The main purpose of the Church was to secure human salvation in the next world, and the fear of the next world—not the love of it—was so strong that every phase of conduct was carefully scrutinized for its bearing on man's future existence. The Greeks meant by "right" conduct actions which had a certain consequence in human society. The Christian meant by it something that affected man's situation in the next world. Not that the Christian was anxious to get there, for there never was a Christian yet who would not rather stop in this world. The only attraction about heaven was that it enabled one to keep out of hell. He loved heaven as a convict might prefer a year's imprisonment to fifty strokes with the "cat." This is seen in the characteristic Christian expression "worldly pleasure." The true Christian had no place for it; not because he did not desire it, but because the chief thing was to make sure of heaven. He denied himself the pleasures of this world, only because he felt it would keep him out of hell in the next. Gibbon's famous expression that it was not in this world that Christians expected to be either happy or useful, has a very much deeper truth than most people imagine.

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The Limits of Maligancy

It is of importance to note that this use of ethical language by the Church brought in time its nemesis.

The primary aim of Christianity—one might say, with considerable truth, its only aim—was to judge human conduct as good or bad as it was believed to affect existence in another life. But religion is, after all, only one of the social forces, and it has to reckon with either the assistance or the resistance that it meets from social life as a whole. Society may tolerate an evil as an organism may tolerate a disease, provided it is not of too serious a character. But when it threatens the very existence of the social structure, then either the disease must become modified in its destructiveness or society itself sinks under the assault. Here we have an exact analogy with a disease-germ. If the germ becomes too malignant, it destroys the organism on which it lives, and so commits suicide in the moment of its complete triumph. If the organism itself fails to develop a resistance, it is completely wiped out. The probability, nay the certainty almost, is that there goes on a form of adaptation on both sides. The germ becomes less malignant; the organism develops a stronger resistance. In this way a point of accommodation is reached, and there is established a moving equilibrium of destructive and resistant forces.

We see the same thing in social life. A society may tolerate a grave evil, children may be ill-used on a large and villainous scale—as was the case in this country a little over a century ago—men and women may be robbed of their social right to a decent life, and may be brutally treated if they do not submit; but there comes a stage at which either the human parasitic class must abate its claims, or the ill-used class must receive some measure of satisfaction. Readers will not find it difficult to supply examples that illustrate both these situations.

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Religion and Morals

An analysis of the purely religious constituents of Christianity shows it, on the one side, to be an embodiment of an extremely primitive form of religion. Indeed, from the point of view of the rationalizing that had gone on among the educated pagans, Christianity was more than an embodiment of these primitive elements, it was a reversion to them. Religiously, there was the god incarnate in a man, there was the equally primitive virgin birth, the never-never land where man imagined an inverted earth giving him all he desired in this world, the god ready to heap favours on those who obeyed him, and who was filled with vengefulness towards those who disobeyed him, the revival of primitive demonology on a very wide scale, the sacrificial eating of the god by which the eater became one with the god, the belief that the gods could and would grant anything to those who gained their favour, and so forth. So far Christianity was mere Mumbo-Jumboism on a slightly more sophisticated scale than is to be found to-day among very primitive people.



But, on the other hand, there were the cultural influences of Greece, of Alexandria and of Rome. Some deference, however unwilling, had to be paid to this factor, some concessions, if only in words, to the social nature of morals. Hence we have, along with the primitive mythology of Christianity, the ethical vocabulary of a more civilized age than that indicated by the religious teachings of the Church. The Church stressed the importance of conduct—such simple virtues as honesty, truth, kindness, loyalty, etc., could not be ignored because they are expressions of the conditions of group life. But in actual interpretation good conduct was that which made for salvation in the next world; conduct was bad because it led to hell, unless by a tardy act of repentance the believer bought relief at the last moment. Ethically the Church was engaged, and is still engaged, in what would be legally called the making and uttering of a false coinage. It *said* one thing, it implied another. Some of the great Churches still have in their catechism the statement that acts, however good they may be, are of the nature of sin unless they proceed from a heart purified by grace. The Church paid a verbal homage to ethical teaching while divesting that teaching of its genuine ethical character. It demoralized through a professedly moralizing process.

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#### Playing with Fire

I think this gives the key to a phenomenon that has puzzled many, and has even led sentimental Freethinkers, whose emotions outrun their intelligence, to find supreme ethical values in Christian teaching. The very men who had "truth" most often on their lips have lied with a pertinacity almost unique in human history. They who talked loudest about brotherly love have been foremost in the perpetration of brutalities that shock the civilized sense. It is too facile an explanation to dismiss these cases, existing as they do on so wide a scale, as exhibitions of humbuggery or hypocrisy. Human nature is not built upon a scale that permits so general an exhibition of conscious double-dealing. Excuses have to be made that moralize actions from which the better part of our natures shrink. Historically the Church lied, and robbed and tortured and killed because of its fanatical ambition to save men's souls in the next world, and counted it cheap to pay the price of social and individual demoralization in this one for its success.

But this forced indulgence in ethical language by the Church, brought what I have called its nemesis. For man had always existed as a social animal, his progress largely consisted in developing a consciousness of the fact—a consciousness that has been so tremendously heightened by a knowledge of general evolution. The process received an enormous impetus from the better aspects of Greek and Roman culture, to be submerged again by the several centuries of Christian rule. The Renaissance and the birth of modern science revived this side of human development. The seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the rise of a science of morals that definitely separated ethics from theology. Ethics took its place as an independent science; not taking its "laws" from, but imposing them on, theology.

The consequences are such as might have been foretold. The Church had made great play with "right" and "wrong," bad and good. But it also claimed to judge right and wrong in terms of the salvation of immortal souls. Society began to call upon the Church to honour its ethical promissory notes, not in terms of another life, but in terms of the present one. The Church had used the language of morality to impose its theology upon the world. It was now the turn of morality to judge the conduct and value of

Church teaching in terms of social values. Actually the attack on the Church was two-fold. On the one side was the intellectual attack represented by the whole range of scientific discoveries, (a factor with which I am not now immediately concerned) on the other there was the factor of ethical self-consciousness. To recur to our former simile the organism was developing a new resistance to the disease-germ.

\* \* \*

#### The Fate of Truth

The consequences of that revolution is writ large in the history of the last two or three centuries. The Church had talked largely of the goodness of God and his love of righteousness. To the objection that, if God was what the Church had said, then evil should not so frequently be in the ascendant, the reply was that we were as clay in the hands of the potter, and it was not our place to question. The objection was not of the most impeccable quality from a logical point of view, but the answer to it was much worse. Doctrine after doctrine was subjected to this dual intellectual and ethical assault, and resulted in myriads of Christians rejecting doctrines that were once accepted without question.

The nemesis of the Church had arrived. Bred in ignorance and fashioned in fear, religion established its universal rule in primitive society. The Christian Church, compelled to use the language of social life, gave to ethical terms a purely religious significance. It exploited man's social instincts and feelings in its own interests. But with social growth the instincts and feelings to which the Church had appealed, and upon the functioning of which in a primitive form it depended, gained an independent strength. The Church had tied itself to a "sacred" book, it based itself on revelation, and on such a foundation progress is impossible. Theologically, moral terms had one significance, ethically they had another. In Christian theology "right" and "wrong" meant agreement with a supernatural revelation. Scientifically they implied certain principles that were in their application modifiable in a series of changing situations. Forced to make concessions to this later social development (such teachings as the doctrine of hell, of vicarious atonement, etc., will supply illustrations of this) religion was actually suffering from the expression of feelings on which it relied for support. The more the Church demands that man shall do right and shun wrong, the more it is, in a civilized society, awakening criticism of itself. The instrument by which the Church sought to rule is two-edged. It was of benefit to the Church so long as one edge only was used. It became dangerous when the other side was used. And when ethical and intellectual judgments unite in opposition to any form of religion that faith has not long to exist.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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The truth is, God and the Devil, however opposite in their nature, and remote from one another in their place of abiding, seem to stand pretty much upon a level in our faith; for as to our believing the reality of their existence, he that denies one, generally denies both; and he that believes one, necessarily believes both.

Very few, if any, of those who believe there is a God, and acknowledge the debt of homage which mankind owes to the supreme Governor of the world, doubt the existence of the Devil. . . .

As the belief of both these stands upon a level, and that God and the Devil seem to have an equal share in our faith; so the evidence of their existence seems to stand upon a level, too, in many things; and as they are known by their works in the same particular cases, so they are discovered after the same manner of demonstration.—*Daniel Defoe.*



## Chelmsford's Cackle

"It cannot be denied that non-belief brings in its train unhappiness and misery."—*Bishop of Chelmsford.*

PARISH magazines, if not things of beauty, are a joy to the worldly-minded, for it is in their sacred pages that the sons-of-god publish those inspiring thoughts which they have evolved in the recesses of their rectories and vicarages. Diocesan magazines are, if possible, still more attractive, for the higher spiritual rank of the episcopal editors gives an additional lustre to the published pearls of thought. Presumably, as a right-reverend father-in-god is superior, socially, financially and spiritually, to a common "reverend," the amount of divine inspiration should in that particular instance be so much the more "above proof."

This lends some importance to the January issue of the Diocesan Chronicle in which the Bishop of Chelmsford has some inspired remarks on the present breakdown of faith. His lordship is really upset, and even angry, at this lamentable state of affairs, and goes out of his way to pen some urbane insolence concerning Freethinkers. He is quite certain that faith is on the down grade, but he is very anxious to emphasize that this is not due to Free-thought. Not on any account! It is due, he says, to that curious disease, "spiritual anæmia," caused by modern life, its complexity, speed, anxiety, pleasure, and uncertainty. But the extraordinary thing is that the Bishop does not gird at modern life, but he has a lot of hard words for the Freethinkers.

This is passing strange. The fundamentals of life endure throughout the ages. Whether it takes a man seven hours, or seven days, to travel from London to Edinburgh is a detail. The Bishop seems to imagine that if that man travels on foot, or by horseback, he would believe the story of Noah's Ark or Jonah and the Whale, but if he goes more quickly he gets "spiritual anæmia," and considers them as being no more than bedtime-stories. Love of pleasure is not confined to this age. Certainly, present-day men crowd the football grounds, women attend cinemas, and lads play shove ha'penny, but that is vastly better than crowding to see their fellow creatures burnt alive for a difference of theological opinion, as they used to do in the ages of faith. Of course, there is anxiety in modern life, but the believer has extra worries. He may be anxious lest he go to "hell" in the hereafter through not paying his pew-rent regularly, or through neglect in the matter of baptism. Despite clerical assurance, Christians do worry concerning such matters; every lunatic asylum has among its patients victims of religious mania. But the dear Bishop shuts his eyes to all this. The world behind the Church door is a happy place, and the most miserable beings outside are the non-believers. They perspire misery and unhappiness.

Why does the Bishop attempt to drag Freethinkers into this mess? He says that they are very unhappy, but instead of sympathizing with them, or asking them to tea, he abuses them. "How can I hate anything," said Goethe, "unless I am myself filled with hatred." The Bishop should ponder that remark. For he expressly says that it is not the poor Freethinkers' fault that the world is seething with non-belief. The real culprits, are motor-engineers, who help to increase the speed of life, the film-producers, theatrical managers, football directors, book-makers, and others, who cater for the love of pleasure. These, and others, are the culprits who spread that dreadful disease "spiritual anæmia," so why abuse the Freethinkers? Anyway, they are bound for "Hell," so why not leave them in peace?

The dear Bishop is not playing the game properly with the simple readers of his diocesan magazine. He tells them that "it cannot be denied that it (non-belief) brings in its train unhappiness and misery." This will not do! The Bishop is not a maiden aunt living in a remote country vicarage, but is a man of the modern world, moving in society, and he must know plenty of men and women as happy as himself who have no belief in anything that he would call religion. It is sheer waste of time to pretend otherwise. If he still blusters and protests, someone had better send him a ticket for the Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, where he will see scores of happy heathen. Whilst he is awaiting the occasion, let him retire to his study and read Voltaire's *Candide*, and Ingersoll's *Mistakes of Moses*, two most amusing and profitable books, which should dispel the idea that all Freethinkers are as solemn as undertakers, as stupid as sacristans and live in an atmosphere of misery and unhappiness.

"The priggishness of unbelief is a very marked feature to-day," writes the Bishop. He has just told us that Freethinkers are all unhappy and miserable. Is their misery and unhappiness the cause of their alleged conceit? Or, is the dear Bishop just "unpacking his heart with words," and trying to hypnotize his deluded followers with sheer, unadulterated verbiage. Prigs indeed! Let the Bishop look at his own sorry profession to discover what fantastic tricks men can play in their quest for gold. It was not a Freethinker, but a consecrated charlatan who dubbed himself "Maximus Pontifex," and it is always cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, who are for ever seeking to snatch temporal power and to delude Democracy.

Another outburst of the Bishop is that "the Agnostic is in a backwater." This is just another trick of the clerical trade. If priests cannot face an argument, they pretend that it is antiquated, or superseded. Maybe, that is one reason why theologians so often refer to Agnostics, and not to Secularists. It is even conceivable that the theologians are more nervous of the Secularists. Let them, however, be assured that both Agnostics and Secularists are but different regiments of the Army of Humane Liberation.

Observe, that the writer of all this nonsense is a right-reverend father-in-god, and not a green young curate fresh from the theological college. He is, in his way, a man of affairs, and should represent his Church with some attempt at sobriety. Yet he wishes to tell his confiding flock things concerning Freethinkers which he must know quite well to be utterly false. His implication is that, unless a man accepts Church of England teaching, he must therefore, of necessity, be unhappy and miserable, or a contributory cause to unhappiness. Has he never met a Freethinker, and has he never read, or glanced at, a Rationalist book or publication? Facts are stubborn things, and worth tons of casuistry. I have known hundreds of Freethinkers, and not one has been miserable or unhappy. On the contrary, they have been a gallant, happy band of enthusiasts, whose magnificent idealism raises one's estimate of human nature. Facing ostracism and persecution in defence of their principles, with no idea of personal gain, these men and women belong to the very flower of the human race. This is not the language of rhetoric or exaggeration; for it is the simple truth that:—

"Spirits are not finely touched  
But to fine issues."

The Bishop of Chelmsford is guilty of the worst form of cant. Did Florence Nightingale, the lady



with the lamp, who ministered to the poor wounded soldiers in the Crimea, bring unhappiness and misery in her train? She was a heretic. When Walt Whitman spent four years of his life ministering in the American war-hospitals did he bring misery to those patients? He was an unbeliever. And what of Robert Owen, who not only built the first infant schools, and improved the dwellings of his work-people, but sought to construct the ideal society of the future? The half century's humanitarian work of Henry S. Salt on behalf of not only men, but also of dumb animals, should be sufficient to confuse the Bishop in his campaign of insult and innuendo. And all Mr. Salt's numerous books reveal him as one of the happiest and sanest of men, a lovable personality.

The Bishop ought to be ashamed of himself. From his secure haven, cushioned with a four-figure salary, he pens his diatribes against better people than himself. His insults are not even his own. They are not even second-hand, they are twenty-second hand. They were used long before he was born. Perhaps he remembers the old-time legal advice, "No case, abuse the plaintiff's attorney." By attempting to discredit Freethought and Freethinkers, he hopes to shield, in some measure, from the searchlights of rational criticism, the two-thousand years' old Oriental Superstition he is associated with. The Christian citadel is crumbling beneath the attacks of the Freethinkers, and the matter will not be unduly prolonged because this Bishop seeks to defend Orthodoxy with a slop-pail and a mop. He may be quite certain about that, for, at long last, Truth is on the march.

MIMNERMUS.

## Literature and Dogma

### II.

In a "purely literary" edition of the Bible, it is difficult to find a justification for choosing one portion rather than another, because of considerations of *authenticity*. Literature, as such, is surely independent of considerations of that kind. But it has been ruled that the story of Jesus should be introduced by *Mark*, which Gospel, we are told, is the "earliest and most authoritative," and "in spite of its brevity, gives a clear picture of him as a great revolutionary humanitarian." Mark's narrative is "supplemented by those incidents and teachings not found in Mark, but in the other Gospels." Which means, if it means anything, that Matthew, Luke and John have been cut where Mark has already related the incident. It should mean as well that Mark is not cut and carries off the palm for *literature*. We are afraid, however, that what it does mean is that Mark is freer from some of those elements which make it difficult to present Jesus in the rôle of "great revolutionary humanitarian." *Mark*, the Editors are conscious, will be read first, and it is to this Gospel that they have applied themselves in order to give the impression of Jesus nearer to their heart's desire. It is Jesus as they would most like him to be, or, putting it another way, it is a Jesus which is most likely at the present day to be preached with acceptance. So Mark is considered to have as literature the right to the first innings, and as a result, Matthew and John are cut liberally, and Luke, a Gospel, which from a literary point of view, has generally been accounted the highest, has been cut to shreds. But, if, in a *literary* edition, one can ring the changes on date, authenticity, vindictiveness and enjoyment, one can, of course, do anything.

No matter, the great revolutionary humanitarian

stands in the Editors opinion, a better chance of displaying himself in Mark. It is a difficult matter putting forward a God as a humanitarian; even the blend of God-Man has proved a nut which theologians have broken their teeth over whenever they have attempted to crack it. The Virgin Birth fortunately had not been heard of by Mark. This accordingly has to appear in the *supplements* of Matthew and Luke.

The first "cut" in Mark is in the third Chapter, 22-30. This includes:—

Verily I say unto you ALL sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith they shall blaspheme.

But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.

This printed piece of revolutionary humanitarianism is printed in Luke (not in Matthew) and by so doing the plan of the Editors as regards the main significance of *Mark* is considerably strengthened.

Chapter IV. (up to the 34th verse) is omitted, this appearing in essence in Matthew, and the next elision is in Chap. ix., verse 43 to the end:—

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Matthew v. 29 and 30 however is printed, although the incident is found in Mark. There is only one plea to be set up, therefore, and that is that Matthew is better literature. The reader may judge for himself:—

And if thy right eye offend thee pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members shall perish, and not that thy whole body shall be cast into Hell.

And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Anyway the Gospel of Mark is (so far) purged of the unspeakable dogma.

Chapter xi. 17-33 and Chapter xii. are omitted, the Matthew version being preferred. Chapter xiii. is omitted in its entirety.

This is the chapter wherein it is foretold that:—

Then they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

And then shall he send his angels and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of heaven.

When was it going to happen, this theatrical re-appearance of the great Humanitarian? *This generation shall not pass away until all these things be done.* "I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

It is difficult to put forward Mark as the gospel setting forth the teachings of a great Social Reformer, when there wasn't going to be any chance of founding a New Jerusalem in this Green and Pleasant Land. Any job of world-planning, it will be seen, would



have to be undertaken under colossal difficulties if the sun was darkened and the moon was not giving forth her light and (a minor inconvenience) the stars of heaven had fallen. There was, of course, going to be one great day, *but only for the elect*. In this case the version of Matthew (and Luke) is again, naturally, preferred, although here again from a "literary" point of view Mark leaves nothing to be desired. From the point of view of "congruity," as well, the second coming of Jesus throws a degree of intelligibility on his advice to 'Take no Thought for the Morrow and live as the Lilies of the Field, teachings which have never been noticeably in the forefront of profane revolutionary humanitarianism. In this we consider the literary editors have lost a chance, in not, to some little extent, evolving order out of chaos.

Anyway, so far, *Mark* is still free from Hell Fire. Probably the idea that good literature must be free from vindictiveness accounts for this. But we do find printed the last words of Jesus in Chapter xvi \* when Jesus had ceased to be man or Man-God and was God of very God. But, although this shuts out the criticism that Hell Fire has been completely cut from *Mark*, this last chapter has been differentiated from any other chapter in the volume by printing it under the title of Appendix, and, in the foreword, we are told:—

The passage printed as an Appendix is generally admitted to be a later addition to the original Gospel.

The famous passage runs:—

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues.

They shall take up serpents, and if they take up any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands upon the sick and they shall recover.

In this disingenuous way it is suggested that this passage lacks validity. But, one asks, what has a non-theological, purely literary edition of the Bible to do with *validity*? It is very obvious that one of the main ideas of the Editors has been to see that the first appearance of Jesus in this volume as a Great Revolutionary Humanitarian must have a little assistance from them, even if some of the minor virtues have to be put into the background in the process. Why, if this is legitimate Editorship, is another generally-admitted later addition to the original, the story of the Woman Taken in Adultery, not printed with identical warnings as to its validity? One is afraid that doing so might inspire the thought: If this is an example of the work of poor, unassisted, man, why drag God in at all?

It is not the intention of this article to suggest that the atrocities and absurdities of the Bible have been omitted from this work. One could not do this with the Old Testament without a colossal amount of blue-pencilling; there is no evidence that this has been attempted. But Modernism in the Churches is not at all bothered about what they call the Old Dispensation; in some ways they think the defective morality an advantage. But it is all-important to make out that the New Dispensation, in this year of Grace, is impres-

\* In the *Freethinker* of January 16, 1938, "Acid Drops," p. 39, it was stated that the Editors of *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature*, when they came across references to Hell Fire did not print them at all, and a similar remark is made about references to The Second Coming of Christ. Put this way it is inaccurate, and as the individual responsible, I apologize for my too hasty conclusions, and also thank a good and vigilant *Freethinker* for giving me this opportunity of making amends.—T.H.E.

sive, and to this end the experts are very busy indeed, and will be well pleased if they can take up even a few baskets-full from the ruins of the Oracles of God.

There is, of course, a point of view from which the Bible is a valuable Book. But that value can only be conserved in one way, and that is by leaving it alone. Let the Old Book tell its story in its own way. Let the tendencious keep their unhealthy activities from a literature which, if printed, *warts and all*, only requires reading with a free and untrammelled mind, to be appreciated and understood in the only useful way possible, namely, as a human document showing the social and moral development of a people. As a *religious* volume it contains within itself the seeds of its own dissolution.

T. H. ELSTON.

## Nature Notes of a Freethinker

"And after him came next the chill December;  
Yet he, through merry feasting which he made  
And great bonfires, did not the cold remember;  
His Saviour's birth his mind so much did glad.  
Upon a shaggy-bearded Goat he rode,  
The same wherewith Dan Jove in tender yeares,  
They say, was nourisht by th' Idaean mayd;  
And in his hand a broad deepe boawle be beares,  
Of which he freely drinks an health to all his peeres."  
*Spenser.*

THERE is a pleasing indifference of the poet to the pagan origin of December's steed, and, in his time, it required courage for a court poet to do anything else but subscribe to current belief. Translated in modern language, this old-fashioned verse, which I confess to liking, really meant that, although any reason was good enough to drink "an health," the time when the sun began to rise earlier was one of the best. The sun, as Saviour, as a real Saviour, would make a fascinating essay. If he, as lazy-bones, should prefer to stay in bed for a year, as far as this world is concerned, mankind would be very small potatoes. There is every reason to believe that last year's crop was nothing startling, and the sun had done his best. Hudson wished to be buried next to Jefferies, and Spenser was interred at his wish next to Chaucer in Westminster Abbey. The wishes of both may be a curious commentary on any acceptance by either of the belief in immortality.

On a frosty morning in December, patience and kindness brought me near enough to a cock chaffinch to enable me to see a puff of breath from his beak at every "Chink! Chink!" he made. In the same month I had sparrows on my fingers feeding off a digestive biscuit. It was bitterly cold, and I could not resist squeezing the toes of one between my fingers; he, Phillip the brave, did not mind; hunger was predominant, and he could not feel the pressure enough to be afraid. Food urge brought bullfinches to the currant tree outside the window, and a colony of long-tailed tits made their appearance for the same reason. The robin, all fluffed out, tried to break the ice on a water bowl, and when he failed, he frisked away from it, cheerful as ever. The brooding Thomas Hardy, whose stark realism I shall admire as long as comprehension lasts, had a soft heart for birds. In his tragic novel, *Tess*, there is the unforgettable scene where his heroine stays the night in a plantation, and she hears new and strange sounds among the leaves. Morning reveals to her wounded pheasants after a day's shooting, which she puts out of their misery by breaking their necks. In *Wessex*



and *Past and Present Poems*, this sympathy appears again in a triolet entitled, "Winter in Durnover Field":—

Rook: Throughout the field I find no grain;  
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!  
Starling: Aye: patient pecking now is vain  
Throughout the field, I find . . .  
Rook: No grain!  
Pigeon: Nor will be, comrade, till it rain,  
Of genial thawings loose the lornland  
Throughout the field.  
Rook: I find no grain:  
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland.

There is no sentiment in birdland. Robins fight each other for territory. A cock blackbird has vanquished a thrush from his feeding ground; the price of his victory was the loss of one eye. Frost and bad weather make these winged fragments of chance at the mercy of facts. And the rusty key of theology unlocks no door to an understanding of bird life. The only thing that stands out clearly to me is, that "Crass Casualty" in bird life is enough to provide a winnowing and destructive influence; in human life I submit the same factor applies. Earthquakes, epidemics, famines and droughts fill the plate of mankind; wars get mankind out of one mess into another mess worse. I only give it as a speculation. Has France yet paid the full price for Napoleon? Has Germany footed the bill for Bismarck, or the Man they couldn't hang?

You may have strawberries in December if you are prepared to pay the price. And now, in the same month, and all the year round bird records for the gramophone are available. A leaf was taken out of late spring by hearing the Willow Warbler by the side of a log fire. Presumption, perhaps, to draw on the future, but it was pleasant to hear again this bird, which, in my opinion, has the happiest and most contented song of all birds. In the song of the nightingale there is sadness, but legend may have put it there. In the prodigality and scattering of the robin's song, there is an undertone, a gentle chiding; he sings more in one year than any other bird, and his song, for want of a better term, is to humans, companionable. There is hope in it, but not an abundance. To turn again to *Tess*, Hardy, who built up the character from three different girls, records of her, "She lives what paper-poets only write." The Willow Warbler's song to me is a dream only of existence in some fabled world; he sings of a state only to be imagined by a human being who would have, for a change, stupidity as rare as common-sense is at the present.

To those readers who can combine an appreciation of the serious with a laugh, or debate for an hour on "Who killed Cock-Robin?" without wrinkling their faces, I commend the following lines of Walter De La Mare. He appears to have a knowledge of The Self; man is the measure of things, and on that basis the turnip-headed monsters, created by fasting saints, cruel tyrants and crafty ecclesiastics, vanish like lightning. It is the position to which the emancipated arrive, knowing that each individual must work it out for himself. And then, the origin and existence of all Gods is known; so much cargo may then be thrown overboard, and man's ship lightened by a useless burden, may sail with profit to his own existence. And by profit, I mean contentment, understanding, fraternal deference, and other possessions that cannot be measured by money. Here then, is Mr. De La Mare's soliloquy, quoted with full acknowledgment for what, to me, is pure gold:—

#### SELF TO SELF

"Wouldest thou happy be  
On earth, where woes are many?  
Where naught can make agree  
Men paid for wage a penny?  
Wherein ambition hath  
Set up proud gate to death;  
And fame with trump and drum  
Cannot undeaf the dumb  
Who unto dust are come?  
Wouldest thou happy be?—  
Impossibility?

So 'tis where reasons rule  
Dunces kept in at school;  
So 'tis when Logic peers  
Sand-blind at her bright shears  
Snip-snapping this and this;  
Ay, on my soul, so 'tis,  
Till looking up thou see  
Noonday's immensity,  
And, turning back, see too  
That in a bead of dew.

Heart-near or fancy-far,  
All' thine to make or mar.  
Thine its sole consciousness  
Whether thou ban or bless.  
Loving delights forgot,  
Life's very roots must rot.  
Be it for better or worse,  
Thou art thy universe.  
If then at length thou must  
Render them both to dust.  
Go with their best in trust.  
If thou wake never: well.  
But if perchance thou find  
Light, that small gloom behind,  
Thou'lt have wherewith to tell  
If thou'rt in heaven or hell!

Here is the genuine egoist in full song who will drink "an health" to those who can see it, to those who want to see it, and to those who don't see it.

NICHOLAS MERE.

#### THE VALUE OF FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

But freedom of discussion can hardly exist without a good many other kinds of freedom: for instance, freedom of speech, freedom of the Press, and a substantial amount of political liberty. That is why throughout history a widespread habit of clear thinking has never existed except among people who have valued, enjoyed, and defended liberty, both political and intellectual. All despotisms and authoritarian governments are well aware of this. They know that authoritarianism or any other kind of political tyranny is incompatible with clear thinking, and they are always compelled therefore sooner or later to make clear thinking a criminal offence. Conversely, people who value liberty have always seen that true liberty is impossible except for those who acknowledge both the right and the duty of thinking clearly. It follows that there is a real connexion between democracy and clear thinking. One of the essential things about democracy is that it is government by discussion, instead of government by force or by the edict of a single man or a clique or class. The Greeks discovered that about 2,500 years ago and we rediscovered it in our parliamentary system. It is the fashion to-day to sneer at democracy and parliaments as talking shops. People who do that merely show that they do not understand the meaning of democracy and of the civilization of free men. The object of discussion is to find the truth by clear thinking, and government by discussion or real democracy therefore is an attempt to base government upon clear thinking and the truth which is only attainable by clear thought.

Leonard Woolf in "The Listener."



## Acid Drops

We have not read the recently issued biography of Sir John Reith, and probably never shall. Our time can be put to better use. But judging from newspaper reviews, his character is as might have been expected from his actions. His religious admirers boast that he belongs to the Manse. For our part, we regret he ever left it. But we remember one story of his own which helps to explain a lot that has happened. It seems, on his own statement, that passing through London he saw an advertisement for one to take control of their infantile B.B.C. So he at once sat down and wrote an application for the post. Just like that! No back-stairs influence, nothing. Just a casual application, and the genius who opened the letter of the unknown applicant, at once appointed him!

In a later account he tells that after having written the letter Reith remembered that the man in whose hands the appointment rested was an Aberdonian. So the son of the Manse re-opened his letter to add that he also came from Aberdeen. Being a good Christian helped him to perceive the morality of securing a post in this way. Certainly a son of the Manse! With any other parentage self-respect might have been stronger.

The *Sunday Chronicle* reviewer says that the post of director of the B.B.C. required a man with certain qualifications. "As a result of heredity, environment, and education," he had these qualifications. He was of an intensely religious nature. He attended Sunday school twice each Sunday, and went to service twice, and also to a Wednesday prayer meeting, just because he liked to do so. He spent two years in an engineering school, and five years in a locomotive works. Could anyone's qualifications be better? Having through the apparently divinely directed action of the one in whose hands the appointment rested, become the B.B.C. chief, his desire was to do without Sunday Broadcasting. But the forces against him were too strong—or God let him down at a critical moment—and he had to be content with making Sunday Broadcasting as religious as possible.

Also, in memory of his father, he introduced the religious ten minute's epilogue, and, we presume, the weekday service. Likewise, we again presume, as a testimony to his religious training, he created the policy of "faked" situations (in which members of the staff played various parts, and outsiders were encouraged to pretend to be what they were not); of censored speeches, suppressed news, Pecksniffian righteousness, and religious cant. All the normal consequences of "heredity environment and education"—plus a few friends in power at the right moment!

The diocesan chronicle of the Bishop of Chelmsford is metaphorically blistered with tears over the "degradation" of worship by "popular services, bright little chats from the pulpits and pleasant Sunday afternoons." To do him justice, he is more faithful to his "articles" of employment than the majority of his "cloth," for he thinks "such methods are only a little less dangerous than the attempts to reduce dogma and remove the miraculous to make Christianity acceptable." He seems to become a bit muddled in his distress when he adds: "I am weary to death of those clergy—occasionally even a bishop offends—who are continually advertising the weaknesses or the failures of the Church." Well—he's a bishop himself, and doesn't seem to be giving it much of a "boost."

"If all the people killed on the roads in the last two days had been bishops, none of the 29 bishops of the Province of Canterbury would be alive to-day," said Bishop Heywood of Ely at Canterbury Convocation. This looks like a testimonial for careless driving.

According to the draft scheme for a United Church of England: i.e., Anglicans plus Nonconformists: freedom from secular control of its "spiritual actions and decision" would be claimed, but this "would not exclude State recognition as the expression of the nation's religious allegiance." Now there are said to be 2,250,000 Anglican communicants and 5,000,000 Nonconformists, so we are to conclude that the remaining 30 or 40 millions of British citizens do not belong to the nation—in the religious sense! The "recognition" implied is the sort of recognition the diner gives the waiter: cash!

While the laboured "wit" of alleged humourists usually falls flat, schoolboy "howlers" usually raise a smile, at least. A recent examination paper gave "Pax in bello" as meaning that you don't have indigestion. "Peace in the belly"—a vivid translation that. Another paper gave "Amen" as meaning "That's the lot"; but we don't think the translator could have been familiar with church service with its "vain repetition" of "Amen" and many other words. However, it is quite possible that he (or she) was a regular church-goer and, like most members of congregations, gabbled away the responses, etc., without the slightest idea of what they were saying: "Gloribetothefatherantheson," etc., etc., "Amen."

The Rev. Raymond Taunton writes about "the silly music that goes round and round." He has much justification for his girdings at this cock-eyed world. When he seeks for remedies he simultaneously decides that "the Christian life" is the thing, and also that too many Christians "are convinced that the Church itself is a roundabout." With obvious sincerity Mr. Taunton deplures many of the current—and we might add the ancient—phenomena of "Christian" conduct. He says:—

I remember looking at a photograph of a Protestant street in Ireland. It was all brick-ends and broken windows, after a visit by Roman Catholics. Then there was a photograph of a Roman Catholic street. It was all brick-ends and smashed windows, after a visit by Protestants.

The Clapham and Battersea Mission recently held a conference, and asked its members to vote on questions connected with betting. "Sweepstakes" was the first question; there was a unanimous vote against Office Sweepstakes where, presumably the prizes were very small. It was decided that the office sweepstake "was against Christian principles." When it came to Football Pools, where the prizes are attractively large, the same Conference voted by a large majority in favour of them. God is not only on the side of the big battalions, but also in favour of the large prizes.

We are glad to see Mr. St. John Ervine, in the *Observer*, objecting to Mr. Aldous Huxley's recent diatribe about religion and the drama. Mr. Ervine calls it "an outburst on the degeneration of the drama through its separation from religious rites, which does little credit to Mr. Huxley's very great intelligence." Mr. Ervine's comments are an admirable protest against clerical "puritanism." He says, "the priest, whatever his sect has always been the enemy of the artist."

We see that the Annual Summer Conference of the Modern Churchmen's Union this year, at Loughborough College, will include a discussion on "The Secular Ideal of Education." This opens at 10 a.m., on Tuesday, September 6. We hope the Secular Education League will be invited to contribute to the discussion, but our "hope" is based on logic rather than experience.

A writer in one of the religious papers deplures the manner in which "Holy water" is kept in some Churches. He says that "the holy water at the Church-door should always be watched with scrupulous care, and frequently renewed. Its condition in some continental churches repels rather than invites its use." But why this fuss about keeping the water clean? While faith was strong there was never this bother getting clean water. After the water has been blessed, and if after being blessed it still har-



hours disease germs and makes the faithful ill, they might just as well go and get a drink of beer. We are quite sure if a glass of beer took the place of water, there would be an increase in Church congregations. We are surprised that some parson has not put this idea into practice.

The Sunday Dances at Keighley, following the religious service, are to continue, but the attendance at Church beforehand is not now compulsory. Holy Trinity Church Council have decided to do so on a unanimous vote. The vicar, in his last week's sermon, said he had not been greatly disturbed; but had been rather saddened, by receiving letters questioning his sanity, and addressing him by such names as "A son of the devil." He deplored the lack of the slightest sense of humour. "You cannot have religion without a sense of humour," he said.

Before the start of Sunday's service an evangelist protested against the holding of the dances and sang hymns to his own accompaniment on the accordion.irate householders told him to go away, and leaflets he was distributing were torn up and thrown in his face. He stood his ground until someone threatened to throw a bucket of water over him. It is evident that the religious sometimes have a sense of humour, even if it be of the kind that is generally described as bad humour.

Humour of the same kind is shown by the writer of a letter in the *Yorkshire Observer*. He refers to

the pharisaical peevishness shown towards a fellow-minister of the Gospel by certain reverend gentlemen who ought to be removing the notes from their own myopic eyes.

Anyway, it is, now, definitely a case of "On with the Dance." The Free Church Council, on the same Sunday evening following this evening service, gave a "sacred play," and a "crowded" audience gathered. The competition has now commenced and developments promise to be entertaining.

The *New Times* and *Ethiopia News* often gives informative matter which is difficult to find elsewhere. A speech given by the Reverend Father Facchinette, delivered at Cremona, on October 30, 1935, contained the following:—

It would appear as though all the world was hostile to us; but, if our God is with us, what does it matter? God watches over Italy, and blesses her in this war, because she is on the side of right and justice.

And, he continued:—

Peace, yes, declared the Holy Father, but peace founded upon justice. By the power of prayer Italy will be able to conquer the resistance of the Ethiopians. Italy will win; Italy will triumph. She will bring to those far away lands, together with the Italian Tricolour, the standard of the Cross.

The power of prayer our contemporary points out, was enhanced by incendiary bombs and poison gas.

Another pictist is General Graziani, who said on June 10, 1936:—

When I have had recourse to force, I always used it with the concurrence of that Tribunal which represents God on earth.

Governments are always a mixture of force and generosity. You that have commanded in days past ought to know that. The road of generosity and force is that which I will follow. God is my witness.

Italian justice is, as the justice of God, reaching everywhere: it will descend heavily on anyone who attempts to disturb the peace of the Ethiopian people.

The Great and All-Powerful God, Master of all men and of their destinies, is witness of the oath we take to-day: to be united in the work of civilization and of greatness imposed upon us by His will for the well-being of Ethiopia.

In the name of God, in that of the Great Italian Nation; in the name of the King and Emperor, Victor Emmanuel III., and in that of the Duce of Fascism, Benito Mussolini, we shall begin to-day the work with pure hearts and a clear conscience."

The *New Times* comments:—

The massacre of Addis Ababa took place a few months after the delivery of this florid oration. Its victims were so many that ordinary sanitary prudence caused them to be soured with petrol and burned on the very spot of their assassination.

The question of films in churches and chapels still seems to worry, not only religious leaders, but religious journals. The *Church Times*, for example, cannot keep away from the subject; it more or less opposed this purely secular means of keeping the faithful to the faith. "Disaster pursues the religious film," it says. "The Seven Years Association of the Church Union has this week given a show in London of films which can only create sadness and apprehension. The young S.Y.A. Film Unit members have been allowed, unsupervised, to produce films that are calculated to embitter less advanced Churchmen, to shock reverent Catholics and Evangelists alike, sometimes by misplaced levity, and sometimes by the filming of the most sacred acts in the Sacraments of the altar and of Penance, and to aim an oblique blow at Church Unity by unnecessary party propaganda." Decidedly the religious mind will not easily reconcile itself to the cinema any more than it did to the theatre.

lest there should be any doubt as to what the Church of England thinks about the Bible, the *Church Times* puts the matter (it hopes) once and for all, when it says that "The Church of England stands undeviatingly for the conviction that Church teaching is Bible truth." It does not exactly define what is meant by "Church teaching" or by "Bible truth"; but that is a little matter, as a lack of definition and obscurity of language have always been characteristics of theological "explanations." One sentence in the journal's defence of the Bible is, however, quite clear. It is that "at the Reformation the Church deliberately emphasized its standing as based on the Scriptures." All that now remains to be done is to settle what the Bible precisely means, and that, as history shows, is quite a simple task.

The *New York Truth Seeker* informs us that a Harvard scientist, Dr. G. W. Harley, has returned from a 12-year stay among savages in Africa, bringing with him more than 300 ceremonial masks used by the Pero tribe. One of the masks belonging to a high priest is caked with human blood. Another exhibit, an axe, was handed down throughout the centuries from one high priest to another always with the sacrifice of the recipient's eldest son. "This is not all cruelty and savage bloodthirstiness," Dr. Harley explains. "It's just that the people take their religion so seriously they hold human life cheap rather than neglect its demands." We can leave it at that.

We have been favoured with a notice of the Immanuel Mennonite Church, Los Angeles. It is announced that Sermons from Science will be given illustrative of Christ as "the Light of the World." Demonstrations of Polarized Light, Microscopic Projection, Invisible Light and Fluorescent Minerals will be preached. A new million volt transformer, 5,000 volt., will be called into requisition, and more than a ton of the latest scientific equipment will be used. It seems as if it is now realized that this is the only way in which a weighty argument for Christianity can nowadays be put forward.

It has been announced by those responsible at the Church of the Sacred Heart, Hillsborough, Sheffield, that any half-pennies found in the offertory will be thrown out unceremoniously into the streets. On Sunday last, this was done, and a crowd of small boys joined happily in the scramble. It is possible that the *widow's mite* was also at the same time ignominiously disposed of, but—what matter? *Pace* Jesus; such niggardliness must be discouraged.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C. F. BUDGE.—We will bear your suggestion in mind. The volume will include other things, beside the Coronation articles.

J.F. PARTINGTON.—We have not seen the book, but your description of it as fanatical appears to be justified.

W. L. ENGLISH.—Thanks. Have not read the book.

L. CHEETHAN.—Thanks for cutting. "Nerves" enter into most diseases to a larger or smaller degree.

VICTOR SORRENSEN.—The account you forward of a family of eleven living in one room in Alderley Street, Liverpool, with a child of three contracting pneumonia and dying, discloses a state of things of which any nation ought to be ashamed—and this is under the shadows of a Cathedral on which several millions of pounds is to be spent!

C. A. KNIGHT.—Your kindly greetings to hand. The good wishes of friends are always cheering.

J. I. MACARTHUR.—Much obliged for what you have done and are doing.

E. PAYNE.—The cutting proves how inadequate it is to reckon the advance of Freethought by the number of avowed unbelievers. A great deal of our work is shown in the undermining of religious dogmas as shown when the teaching of the Churches to-day is compared with what it was a half century or so past.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

The "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

On Sunday next (February 20) Mr. Cohen will speak at the Cosmo Debating Society, Nottingham. This is an afternoon lecture. The chair will be taken at 2.30. The address is usually followed by a lively discussion.

Quite evidently there is room for sustained propaganda in Edinburgh. Mr. Cohen's meeting there on Sunday last, brought an audience that covered every foot of available seating and standing-room. Many were unable to obtain admission. There were a number of questions, of not too high a quality, but these served but to illustrate the need for further propaganda. There was also a good sale of literature. Mr. Smithies occupied the chair.

The Christian liar is working very hard just now. We receive an apparently endless stream of cuttings about the International Freethought Conference to be held in

London, steadily repeating the tale of its being arranged from Moscow, which is sending over huge sums of money for its service. Catholic papers are working hard at this, but some of the more orthodox Church papers are also doing their bit. Petitions are being drawn up in many places asking the Government to prevent such an insult being offered to Christians. Two of these members of the Great Lie Brigade asked the Home Secretary whether he had anything to tell the House concerning it, whether he knew of the money being sent by Moscow, and also whether he could not stop such a Conference being held.

To this Sir Samuel Hoare replied that he had no information as to any Congress being fixed for April (the date selected by these fine Christian advocates) nor of any money being sent here by Russia. There was a Conference being held in September of the "International Federation of Freethinkers," (actually the World Union of Freethinkers) which was invited by four English Societies. We do not imagine that this will stop the Great Lie Brigade, or their muddle-headed representatives in Parliament repeating outside Parliament the statements they have already set in circulation.

The Annual Dinner and Dance of the West London Branch N.S.S. will be held on Thursday, March 10, 1938, at the Union Helvetia Club, Gerrard Place, Shaftesbury Avenue, W.1. Tickets 4s. Vegetarians specially catered for. Early application for tickets will be appreciated. Tickets may be obtained from the Branch Secretary, C. Tuson, 2a Fairway Avenue, Boreham Wood, Herts.

The Peterborough Advertiser in its weekly Calendar, notes the death of Charles Bradlaugh on January 30, 1892. It places at the foot of the calendar a note headed Freethinker. The note runs as follows:—

On January 30, 1890, died Charles Bradlaugh. Avowed Agnostic, he was generally regarded as a man of wonderful all-round ability. He gained a reputation in Parliament for common-sense and vigorous debating power. His zeal for reform was insatiable.

"Avowed Agnostic" for the man who never ceased to champion Atheism is rather good. Perhaps it was intended as a compliment.

It is difficult exactly to place such a pamphlet as Dr. W. W. Harvey's *Up From Christianity*, which is described by its author as a "Spiritual Autobiography showing the 'growth in grace' of a thoughtful doubter." He seems to want to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. He is "loth to be called a Christian," but he quotes Jesus "in conversation more often than any other authority," and is inspired by Jesus "more and more as the years go by." Indeed, Dr. Harvey is so obsessed by Jesus, that although he has given up the miracles, the devils, and many of the other characteristics of Christianity, he devotes a number of pages to show how wonderful is the Christian deity, and what a great psychologist he is—possibly because Dr. Harvey himself is a psychologist.

But he goes further than that. He is so impressed by the crucifixion and the resurrection, that he is going "to treat the matter adequately" in a volume at a future date. As it is, we are given a discussion on the "empty tomb," and whether the disciples stole away the body, and the walk to Emmaus, and "the confused and doubtful story" of the appearance of Jesus to his followers—all gravely discussed as if it were authentic history instead of being just as much fiction as the similar stories in the Apocryphal Gospels. Dr. Harvey gives an excellent bibliography at the end of his pamphlet; but he shows little evidence of having understood the arguments of Robertson, Massey, Doane, Mangasarian, Remsburg, and the other Freethinkers who have so effectively proved that the Christ of the Gospels (the only one we know anything about) is pure myth. It is only fair to add, however, that Dr. Harvey's pamphlet shows a fair and tolerant outlook, and is marked by the broad humanity of the author. It is an excellent example of the attitude of the "reverent" Rationalist to Christianity.



## Defenders of the Faith

"Those who follow the banners of Reason are like the well-disciplined battalion, which, wearing a more sober uniform, and making a less dazzling show than the light troops commanded by Imagination, enjoy more safety and even more honour, in the conflicts of human life."

*Sir Walter Scott.*

A NOTICEABLE feature of the time is the journalistic activity of the lay henchmen of clericalism. Profiting by the innate conservatism of so many British people, they strive, in the pages of various secular journals, to secure acceptance of the old, old, story of Jesus and his love, which, owing to the non-fulfilment of his promises by the "Supreme Being" has, by many, been categorized with the rest of the world's fairy tales. Christianity is founded on the vain imaginings of superstitious and bemused supernaturalists in the service of the rich and powerful, for the purpose of keeping the poor and weak in subjection and in obedience to their wealthy masters. This can be proved from every chapter of the history of supernaturalism. Who ever dreamed, until very recently, of any poor labourer having the right to an opinion of his own? That the poor man has now the right to be heard on political and religious questions is wholly owing to the advance of Freethought.

The moment any man says to another, "This is good for me; it must also be good for you," he allies himself with the forces of tyranny, because he takes upon himself to judge for another in what affects him personally and privately. But the religious press-hacks who seek solemnly to warn their fellows of the "danger" of renouncing supernaturalism do not seem to be adequately equipped for their job. One minute they appear to suggest that religion is a communal thing and anon that it is something individual. Religion may be made to appear superficially a communal thing when it is adopted and recognized by the State. But the old dissenters certainly regarded it as an individual thing, and the recent rapprochement between the Prelate-ruled Church of England and those who are supposed to represent the "Free" Churches is enough to make the predecessors of the latter turn in their graves. But the whole cause of Supernaturalism is now recognized by all the clerics to be in danger; and in the frenzied mobilization of the forces of the Faith, any kind of recruits will be welcome. In other days ecclesiastics were engaged in conflicts of theory. Now they are up against Reality.

The flutterings in the dovescotes of divinity are shown by the occasional comments upon the replies to the "Recall to Religion"; by bishops showing loss of temper with the temporizers with advanced thought, and by pitifully pathetic adjurations in articles in the Secular Press. A special example of the last is an effusion by Mr. Beverley Baxter in the *Sunday Graphic* of January 23, headed "The War Against God!" Poor God! He is frequently unhappy in his champions; and in this instance may very well be induced to exclaim: "Save me from my friends!"

Of course the writer's intention is, if possible, to frighten others besides submissive, self-effacing and snivelling believers with the assertion of an horrible anti-God-movement here and now in this Heaven-blest Island of Britain! A Bishop whom Mr. Baxter quotes says it is "unofficial"—whatever is intended to be meant by that. Incidentally, every great reform in human thought and conditions has been the pioneer work of an "unofficial" kind. This blessed father-in-God says the anti-God movement works underground. He must have been out with the molecatchers. But he must be very imperfectly in-

formed if he is not aware that for over half a century there has been a weekly journal in Britain regularly and outspokenly—and publicly, openly and above ground vigorously attacking the belief in supernaturalism as a debasing and retrograde influence. The Archbishop of Canterbury is also quoted—the only point requiring to be noted in his oft-repeated rubbish is his affected concern for the "independence of the human personality" which demonstrably cannot exist by identification with supernatural belief. Servile mental dependence is of the very essence of religion.

Mr. Beverley Baxter is clearly entitled to his own opinions; but he is *not* entitled to demand that others shall accept them. Much of what he writes is autobiographical. And what he says of the varied human representations of the deity goes a long way to show that the Christian God is not necessarily the "Supreme Being" for all times and all peoples. But in arriving at his opinions, he has been guilty of failure to study the place and weight of human thought and aspiration in all nations and sections of mankind. Gods come and Gods go; and Mr. Baxter is in no better position than the veriest savage to pronounce that the Christian God of the present will be known of 10,000 years hence. But what is all this nonsense about the impossibility of human beings finding peace unless their minds have some imaginary god to play with? We have known several Christian believers of unselfish and honest intent, who only secured peace by ridding themselves of the yoke of supernaturalism. It is too true that the influences which are allowed to play on the individuality determine what the individuality will think, feel, like and dislike, what it will mentally accept and mentally reject. But religion does not concede the right of individuality to think for itself on certain questions. This is the yoke of Supernaturalism, and the proposed removal of this yoke is what Mr. Baxter and his like portentously describe as "War Against God." But after all it is the Salvation—not of God, but of the clerical profession that is the supreme consideration with these believing pen-pushers. But they only prejudice their case with thoughtful people by repeating the falsehood that the arts die without religion. It is too well known that Atheistic authors, poets and painters have bequeathed imperishable gifts to mankind.

Mr. Baxter writes this curious sentence: "It is one of the paradoxes of human nature that Atheism is produced by material success as well as by despair." He must excuse Freethinkers smiling at this. If it were commonly true that Atheism is produced by material success, the agencies for mental liberation would certainly not be so hard put to it for funds to enable them to spread their propaganda! The suggestion that Atheism is also produced by despair is simply a Christian lie. Religionists find it a favourite weapon to preach that Atheism is associated with gloom and hopelessness. But it is all the other way about. The majority of mental liberationists in this country are poor men and women; but they are inspired by a high and vitalizing hope. "Despair" has no place in the vocabulary of Freethought. We find the hopeless and despairing in the ranks of those poor people who have implicitly believed in the doctrines of Christianity. It is no easy task to enlighten or emancipate such victims of clerical control. As Mr. J. D. Beresford has well put it: "The strongest of all habits is that of acquiescence. It is this habit of submission which explains the admired patience and long-suffering of the abjectly poor. The lower the individual falls, the more unconquerable becomes the inertia of mind which interferes between him and revolt against his condition. All the miseries of the flesh, even starvation, seem preferable to the making



of an effort great enough to break this habit of submission."

Oh, to stir up a feeling of pride and self-respect in such people!

"The poor ye have with you always."

IGNOTUS.

## The World Union of Freethinkers

THE Executive Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers has produced an excellent *Handbook*, which should prove of great service to those attending the coming Conference to be held in London later this year. It is in French, but French is more or less understood by many Freethinkers, especially those living abroad; and it is perhaps the nearest approach to an international language we have. I am aware, of course, of the claims of Esperanto, and I am in hearty agreement with Esperantists who are trying so hard to make it an international language. When all Governments will agree to make the acquirement of Esperanto compulsory in all schools one of the greatest steps to peace, and the solidarity of the peoples of the world will have been accomplished. The variety of languages is, I am convinced, one of the greatest barriers to the Brotherhood of Man; and it cannot be denied that one may be very disappointed at a Conference, even of Freethinkers, when much that is said cannot be understood by many present.

However, here is an extremely well printed book full of information, not only on the past history of the World Union of Freethinkers, but with many other notable features. There is a short sketch of the "Origins of Freethought"; one on the beginnings of the International Federation of Freethought in 1880, at Brussels; a Declaration of the Principles of the World Union; and an account of the present Executive Committee.

It is interesting to note the world famous names of some of the founders in 1880: Buchner, Liebknecht, Bradlaugh, Herbert Spencer, Clemence Royer, Mole-shott, Carl Vogt, all of whom achieved international reputations.

At the Congress of Prague, in 1936, certain Statutes and Rules were adopted, and these are given in full. There is also a short account of the proceedings at some of the other Congresses, the one of 1904, in Rome, being described as perhaps the best of them all. This was attended by Lord Snell, Mr. Chapman Cohen, G. W. Foote, J. M. Robertson and Moncure Conway being among the English delegates. The resolutions passed, says the *Handbook*, "constitute a precious charter, to which we are constantly indebted."

In 1925 the Congress was unable to sit in Rome owing to the advent of Fascism; but it managed to meet for three days in Berlin in 1931.

The year 1930 saw the Jubilee of the founding of the International Federation of Freethought, and the occasion was made one of great rejoicing. A beautiful statue to the memory of Francisco Ferrer had been erected as far back as 1911 in Brussels; and needless to say it was specially honoured by the delegates. Among the many photographs in the *Handbook* is one of this statue, a fine example of the sculptor's art.

The Prague Congress is fully reported, with lengthy resumés of all the speeches, and many illustrations of the delegates, singly and together. Of special interest are those of Lord Snell, who, though

he was not present, is included as the President of the R.P.A., Mr. Chapman Cohen, as the President of the N.S.S., and Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, who was present, and whose speech is translated in the *Handbook*. There is also a particularly interesting account of the inauguration of another statue to Ferrer at Moravska—Ostrawa, on April 15, 1936.

The words and music of what is hoped to be the "signature" tune of Freethought are also given; whether they are quite as inspiring as the *Marseillaise* will be a matter of opinion.

Finally, there is an interesting "Calendrier Laïc, something on the lines of the famous one of Auguste Comte. Every day of the year is consecrated to some famous man or woman (very few women though) connected in some way with freedom of thought. They are divided into groups—poets, prose writers, artists, pacifists, inventors, humanists, and so on. It cannot be said that England shines conspicuously in any of the sections. This is due to the compilers, for England has a long list of eminent heretics from Herbert of Cherbury to Darwin, many of whose names should have appeared. Out of thirty-one in the group of Freethinkers, Bradlaugh is the only name, most of the others being French. There are no English artists or composers except that of Ruskin, none among the "pioneers," and only Huxley and Darwin among the scientists. No English names are found among the "revolutionaries," and only that of Locke and Spencer among the philosophers. Shakespeare is naturally given, so is Byron, Burns, Longfellow and Hood, but Dickens is omitted. Only in the section devoted to inventors do we find more justice to British and American names. Out of thirty, there are seven. Altogether there are twenty British names. It is also curious to find that Thomas Paine's name is spelt "Payne," while Bradlaugh's is "Bradlaught"—the only mistakes, I think, in the lists. For the rest, of course, some of the greatest names in the world are included, and rightly so.

No price of the *Handbook* is given, nor where it can be procured; but no doubt it will be for sale at the Conference. It should prove of the greatest interest to all those who have the cause of International Freethought at heart.

H. CUTNER.

## Is the Cinema Demoralizing?

THE discussion took place at a Church literary society, the full title being: Is the tendency of the modern cinema demoralizing? Quite an entertaining evening, but while ostensibly "open," the minds of the disputants were decidedly closed. Which, of course, considering the auspices was only natural.

Since ever I remember I have heard this talk of demoralization. The kind-hearted magistrate who condemns the evil influence of the films when sentencing juvenile sweet-stealers to be flogged had his counterpart in my day in the moralist who attributed childish depravity to the reading of "penny dreadfuls." Very unjust are both attitudes for the thrillers of literature and screen are monotonously moral. That is their most depressing feature, for nothing is more demoralizing than emphasized morality.

But what on earth is this "tendency" of the modern cinema? Is it any different from the tendency of the Radio, the Press, and the Pulpit, or anything else in the modern age? The moralist might say that the Cinema was but one piece of the huge crazy pavement where we all dance damnation to our souls.

Origins make interesting study. Variations—miscalled improvements—indicate "tendency." The primitive is pure, progress means demoralization. The magic lantern of Victorian days was innocent, albeit



humourless. Once when the clergyman gave us "A tour in the Hebrides," however, a slide was put on upside down, showing the ship in mid-ocean. We all rocked with hilarity, oblivious of the fact that we were contemplating a titanic tragedy involving the lives of hundreds of human beings, and our pastor. The seeds of demoralization must have been in the air, for it was at this meeting that studied movement was shown on the screen for the first time. A fat man was seen eating sausages off a plate in about six jerky movements. It was epoch-making, and aroused wild enthusiasm. Time has marched on, and the spasmodic sausage of the lantern age has become the ubiquitous spaghetti, the backbone of our modern comedy.

It becomes abundantly clear at this stage in our investigations that the genesis of the tendency to demoralization is movement. Now the silent film is the ideal entertainment for the deaf. Similarly the Radio is all-sufficiency for the blind. But the mixed marriage, the wedding of sound to movement, set out to satisfy aural and visual cravings. Conjugal relations have not always been harmonious, for the normal person may now be demoralized by movement, by sound, or by the synchronization of both. And sometimes an unhappy state of affairs is set up where cacophony and flicker have made one envy the afflicted.

But, of course, "the people" may be demoralized by anything. For it is always the others who are liable to be corrupted. And ethical standards vary considerably. Smoking, drinking, meat eating, card-playing, dancing, theatre-going, racing, sport-loving and the eating of liquorice all-sorts . . . all these things are denounced by somebody or other.

I am taken to the pictures occasionally and enjoy being demoralized. "The eyes and ears of the world," jumping at lightning speed from winter sports in Switzerland to iron-smelting in Brazil, from aviation in the Sahara to deep-sea diving in the Arctic, make my nervous system go hot and cold, and decidedly bothered. I am always a split-second late. Mentally I am playing tennis at Wimbledon, when my reactions ought to be to the war on China. Physically and spiritually I fail to synchronize. Opening my eyes after a vicious uppercut by Tommy Farr, I am soothed by the comparatively long announcement that "Ices may be procured from the attendants."

I seldom get beyond the opening stages of the principal picture. Indeed sometimes when the list of producers, authors, and assistant authors and producers is inordinately long. I go to sleep. The one feature I concentrate on is "coming shortly," for it affords an excellent guide as to what to avoid. I am reminded of the kindly old lady who befriended a tramp who had filthy face and hands. Said she in horrified tones: "When what you see is so terrible, what like must the parts be that you don't see?"

Why are the sympathies of the poor always with the police and against the alleged wrong-doer? What a shout of triumph goes up from the children of "the criminal classes" in the Pea-nut Palace when the mounties get their man, or some poor wretch is riddled with lead in the inevitable round up. Apart from the moral attitude in these gangster and thriller episodes, I never know who's who with all the scurrying about, changing horses and cars. But the little children know, their intelligence is higher than mine, they can follow the clues, they have the language. Guys, ginks, saps, bulls, stiffs, buddys, boneheads, getting earfuls, or spilling beans, lumping off or giving the low-down . . . av schuks, oh yeah, scam! The little children know it all. They are thrilled, caught up, captivated. To them it is adventure, it is danger, courage, colour, heroism; it is triumph over difficulties, for villainy is always brought to book, and virtue wins in the end.

Is this aspect of the Cinema demoralizing? The answer is in one's attitude to life. Curiously there are two distinctly different points of view held by Christians.

Our good friend, the man in the street (who is seldom in the street), the glass of ale, jolly old game of darts chap, who has lately drawn good wages from his work on munitions, will have a very complacent view (if any) of the tendency of the cinema or of anything else. He

will give his little boy a gun and a sword on the birthday of the Prince of Peace, and play "Land of Hope and Glory" on the gramophone. Are we demoralized? Not bally likely.

Another type of Christian, with some show of reason, might get all worked up about the pursuit of pleasure, about Mammon worship, the shameless parade of opulence and depravity, the corruption of innocence, sowing and reaping, and the ephemeral glitter of this world.

But the philosopher would be sweetly reasonable, contenting himself with stating that the Cinema merely mirrored the tendency of a decadent civilization. True, he has to study the matter, but his interest is chiefly technical. From his comfortable seat, he regards intently the wonderful rendering particularly in the flesh tones, of the Nu-color stupendous production of *The Gold Diggers of 1938*.

J. EFFEL.

### Practical Joke of a Planetoid

On the 27th October last a planetary body was observed moving in the direction of the Earth. It was then some millions of miles distant. Its size could not be ascertained. There was a strong possibility of this body crashing into the earth. Had this happened, the latter might have been shocked out of its orbit and sent rushing to the Sun. But the visitor sped past within 400,000 miles, so no harm was done.

The astronomers, being sensible men, said nothing about the matter until all danger had passed.

Had they broadcasted the matter immediately after discovery—what would have happened? I think more or less what I now proceed to describe:—

1. An S.O.S. call would have throbbed around the Globe, calling upon all men, and especially the Faithful, to pray that the great catastrophe might be averted. This emanated from the Vatican, from Lambeth, from the Metropolitan in Greece, from all United States' religious bodies, from the Moderator of the Presbyterians—from the "Wee Frees," and from the Oxford Group. The Grand Mullah and the Head of the Brahmins also joined the movement, but the Buddhists held themselves scornfully aloof. Ghandi donned a new loin cloth he had just woven. He called the garment his "minus fours."

2. The whole world, so to say, fell upon its knees; such a chorus of prayer, psalmody and penitential wailing had never previously vexed the atmosphere. People fell on the necks of their dearest enemies. Many shouted their sins aloud. In this relation spouses frequently surprised one another. Women threw away their lipsticks, rent their most expensive garments and almost ceased from talking scandal. Few slept on the night of the 28th. The catastrophe was timed for the following day.

3. The 29th passed; there was no catastrophe. There was a general feeling of relief, mingled with a sense of disappointment. Many felt embarrassed when they recalled the confessions they had made. However, within a few hours the clerical floodgates burst open and people gave themselves over to an orgy of religious enthusiasm.

4. The Pope, in a Bull: "*Ex Auctoritate Mihi Commissa*," called upon the world generally, and the Roman Catholic faithful in particular, to appreciate this signal proof of the efficacy of prayer. He generously pointed out that the petitions of the Mohammedans, the Brahmins—and even of the "Wee Frees," may have reached the Throne, if only in an attenuated form. But, of course, the grand dynamic came from the occupant of Peter's chair. But the Bull was regarded as a liberal one.

5. An Anglican Bishop bleated: "Here, my brethren is a signal which even those most spiritually blind must surely understand. The Astronomers computed mathematically, and in spite of that heathen, Einstein, we know that mathematics cannot lie, that this portentous planetoid was rushing straight towards the Earth. What deflected it? Was it not the Almighty Hand that in the days of Noah wrathfully, but justly whelmed this Globe in a mighty flood? And why did that Hand make the



merciful gesture? Was it not done in response to the agonized petitions of sinful but repentant mankind—urged thereto by the Church? Do you want more irrefragable proof that the Kingdom of Heaven is indeed at hand. But do not fail to keep in mind the fact that there are many other Planetoids in the armoury of the Most High!

All the Bishops, Moderators, etc., and even the Rabbis, followed in the same strain.

6. The general consumption of liquor increased by 25 per cent.

7. The divorce courts became much congested. People thought it unlikely that the Almighty would waste any more planetoids; not yet, anyhow.

8. The Inquisition was re-established in all Roman Catholic countries.

9. The World settled down to another 1000 years of refreshed and renewed superstition.

In Saecula Saeculorum. Amen.

W. C. SCULLY.

### Engels on Agnosticism

WHAT, indeed, is agnosticism, but, to use an expressive Lancashire term, "shamefaced" materialism? The agnostic's conception of Nature is materialistic throughout. The entire natural world is governed by law, and absolutely excludes the intervention of action from without. But, he adds, we have no means either of ascertaining or of disproving the existence of some Supreme Being beyond the known universe. Now, this might hold good at the time when Laplace, to Napoleon's question, why in the great astronomer's "Mécanique céleste" the Creator was not even mentioned, proudly replied: "Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse." But nowadays, in our evolutionary conception of the universe, there is absolutely no room for either a Creator or Ruler; and to talk of a Supreme Being shut out from the whole existing world, implies a contradiction in terms, and, as it seems to me, a gratuitous insult to the feelings of religious people.

Again, our agnostic admits that all our knowledge is based upon the information imparted to us by our senses. But, he adds, how do we know that our senses give us correct representations of the objects we perceive through them? And he proceeds to inform us that, whenever he speaks of objects or their qualities, he does in reality not mean these objects and qualities, of which he cannot know anything for certain, but merely the impressions which they have produced on his senses. Now, this line of reasoning seems undoubtedly hard to beat by mere argumentation. But before there was argumentation, there was action. "Im Anfang war die That." And human action had solved the difficulty long before human ingenuity invented it. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. From the moment we turn to our own use these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-perceptions. If these perceptions have been wrong, then our estimate of the use to which an object can be turned must also be wrong, and our attempt must fail. But if we succeed in accomplishing our aim, if we find that the object does agree with our idea of it, and does answer the purpose we intended it for, then that is positive proof that our perceptions of it and of its qualities, so far, agree with reality outside ourselves. And when ever we find ourselves face to face with a failure, then we generally are not long in making out the cause that made us fail; we find that the perception upon which we acted was either incomplete and superficial or combined with the results of other perceptions in a way not warranted by them—what we call defective reasoning. So long as we take care to train and to use our senses properly, and to keep our action within the limits prescribed by perceptions properly made and properly used, so long shall we find that the result of our action proves the conformity of our perceptions with the objective nature of the things perceived. Not in one single instance, so far, have we been led to the conclusion that our sense-perceptions, scien-

tifically controlled, induce in our minds ideas respecting the outer world that are, by their very nature, at variance with reality, or that there is an inherent incompatibility between the outer world and our sense-perception of it.

But then came the Neo-Kantian agnostics and say: We may correctly perceive the qualities of a thing, but we cannot by any sensible or mental process grasp the thing in itself. This "thing in itself" is beyond our ken. To this Hegel long since, has replied: If you know all the qualities of a thing, you know the thing itself; nothing remains but the fact that the said thing exists without us; and when your senses have taught you that fact, you have grasped the last remnant of the thing in itself, Kant's celebrated unknowable "Ding an sich." To which it may be added, that in Kant's time our knowledge of natural objects was indeed so fragmentary that he might well suspect, behind the little we know about each of them, a mysterious "thing in itself." But one after another these ungraspable things have been grasped, analysed, and, what is more, reproduced by the giant progress of science; and what we can produce, we certainly cannot consider unknowable. To the chemistry of the first half of this (19th) century organic substances were such mysterious objects; now we learn to build them up one after another from their chemical elements without the aid of organic processes. Modern chemists declare that as soon as the chemical constitution of no matter what body is known, it can be built up from its elements. We are still far from knowing the constitution of the highest organic substances, the albuminous bodies; but there is no reason why we should not, if only after centuries, arrive at that knowledge and, armed with it, produce artificial albumen. But if we arrive at that, we shall at the same time have produced organic life, for life, from its lowest to its highest forms, is but the normal mode of existence of albuminous bodies.

As soon, however, as our agnostic has made these formal mental reservations, he talks and acts as the rank materialist he at bottom is. He may say that, as far as we know, matter and motion, or, as it is now called, energy, can neither be created nor destroyed, but that we have no proof of their not having been created at some time or other. But if you try to use this admission against him in any particular case, he will quickly put you out of court. If he admits the possibility of spiritualism *in abstracto*, he will have none of it *in concreto*. As far as we know and can know, he will tell you there is no Creator and no Ruler of the universe; so far as we are concerned, matter and energy can neither be created nor annihilated; for us, mind is a mode of energy, a function of the brain; all we know is that the material world is governed by immutable laws, and so forth. Thus, as far as he is a scientific man, as far as he *knows* anything, he is a materialist; outside his science, in spheres about which he knows nothing, he translates his ignorance into Greek and call it agnosticism.

FREDERICK ENGELS: "The Introduction to Socialism, Utopian and Scientific."

### Correspondence

#### CHRISTIAN MORALITY AND VENEREAL DISEASE TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—Miss Neilans, of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, and I are pursuing (though perhaps not settling) our differences of opinion by private letter. The fact of the I.C.C.'s vicious censorship of the film sponsored by the National Society for the Prevention of Venereal Disease remains; but for the benefit of your readers who saw her letter, I mention these two points:—

(1) *The Trevethin Committee*.—Had to consider medical prevention "having regard to administrative practicability, including cost"; and pointed out that "all improvements must no doubt be limited by the funds available," and that there was a limited amount of public money available. In these circumstances they considered that "wherever there is a limited amount of public



money available," it would be more profitably spent on treatment, general public education, and improvement of conditions, than on specific self-disinfection education; because they considered (though on "very little direct evidence") that results of public facilities for disinfection would be "very small." While confirming the value of treatment, the Committee were apparently moved on the question of public self-disinfection by practically the same consideration as was urged against treatment itself before it became established—the probable failure of the public to co-operate intelligently!

What is more important, the Committee established almost beyond question that for a man to use self-disinfection promptly and efficiently would "almost certainly prove effectual."

(2) *Christian Obstruction*.—Miss Neilans, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (an excellent body in so many ways), with other Christian organizations, churches, and individuals, oppose these "almost certain" methods of self-disinfection, because they believe "that which is morally wrong cannot be medically right." To them abstinence outside marriage is the "only real prevention," and medical preventatives are morally wrong and therefore medically wrong; that in practice (naturally) they are not only immoral, but useless; that they lead to increased immorality, hence increased infection; and that therefore they are medically wrong and must be opposed.

Miss Neilans also says, "Ecclesiastical morality is not always what some people believe to be 'Christian morality.'" This will sound familiar to your readers, and I can leave them to draw the inference that what Miss Neilans was really saying was, "We may oppose what other people not as moral as we are, are foolish enough to think will prevent disease by medical means, but we do not oppose what *we* think is the only real prevention (chastity); and as for those people who do not agree with us, well, whatever they may call themselves, they are not really Christian."

RONALD STANDFAST.

#### RUSSIA AND DICTATORSHIP

SIR,—What is Mr. Jack Lindsay's opinion of a book recently published on Russia, *An Assignment in Utopia*, by an American named Lyons (Eugene)? (Publisher, Harrap).

If Mr. Lyons is to be believed he was the first foreign journalist to interview Stalin.

Would Mr. Lindsay dismiss this work as "Capitalist Propaganda"?

But if Mr. Lyons is to be believed, Russia, far from being a democracy, is as bad as, if not a more decidedly rabid Dictatorship than, Germany, and a country in which human life counts not at all.

But read Mr. Lyons' book and Mr. Lyons is one of the few people who has made an extended stay in the country.

W. R. ENGLISH, M.B.

#### Branch News

##### WEST LONDON BRANCH

Professor J. B. S. Haldane's lecture, "Why I Am an Atheist," delivered last Sunday, attracted, as was anticipated, a full house. Mr. E. C. Saphin, who was in the chair, paid a tribute to the courage of the distinguished scientist in openly avowing his Atheism, and called it an "event." Prof. Haldane then gave a brilliant and original address dealing with his subject as a practical scientist. In the course of his remarks he admitted that he had called himself an Agnostic for many years, but found it a most unsatisfactory position. He showed also how, through the Marxian philosophy, he had turned from Idealism to Materialism. Prof. Haldane carefully examined some of the familiar Theistic arguments, such as the First Cause and the Design Argument, as well as the modern theories of Eddington and

Jeans, and the replies by Prof. Milne. He thought that the recent developments in physics made the Materialist position stronger than ever, and gave many convincing illustrations in support of his criticisms. An animated discussion followed, during which keen appreciation of the lecture was shown, Prof. Haldane further clarifying his position in his reply. It was a notable evening for the West London Branch, and Prof. Haldane was given a very warm welcome by an enthusiastic audience.—H.C.

#### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

##### LONDON

###### OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond-Hampstead): 11.30, 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.

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.

###### INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH (Alexandra Hotel, South Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4): 7.30, Mr. Clement Bruning (Propaganda Administrator British Union of Fascism)—"British Fascism."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Professor John Hilton, M.A.—"The Citizen and the Law."

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

##### COUNTRY

###### INDOOR.

BEDLINGTON: 7.0, Thursday, February 17, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane): 7.0, H. H. Jones, B.A. (Manchester; The Vegetarian Society)—"Vegetarianism."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Forum, Albion Court, Kirkgate): 7.15, Mr. A. C. Dutton—"A Hunting we will go."

BURNLEY (St. James' Hall, Women's Section): 8.0, Monday, February 14, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Significance of Psycho-Analysis."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Will Christianity Revive?"

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Freegardeners' Hall, Picardy Place): 6.45, Mr. T. L. Smith (Glasgow N.S.S.)—"Fallacy."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY St. Andrews, Kent Hall, Kent Road): 7.0, Rev. M. S. Simmons, M.A. (Oxford), B.A. (London)—"Aspects of Jewish Life and Culture."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Dr. Har Dayal, M.A., Ph.D., of the Modern Culture Institute—"Christian Missions in India and the East."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, Islington Liverpool, entrance in Christian Street): 7.0, A. Jackson (Bootle)—A Lecture.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. ("King's Café," Oxford Road): 7.0, Mrs. Janet Chance (London)—"Freethought and Socialism."

STOCKTON (Jubilee Hall): 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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