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

Views and Opinions

The Easter Myth

FOR some time there has been a move towards giving Easter a fixed date. It is said it would be more convenient from a general point of view, although one cannot see what difference it would make, inasmuch as one can know as far ahead as one wishes to know on what date Easter will fall. I fancy the reason is, at bottom, that of introducing another obstacle in the recognition of the true character of Christianity. For, according to the Christian religion Easter is identified with an historic event—not an event in the shape of the origin of a belief about someone, but an event in the same sense that we say June 18 is the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, or November 11 is the date on which the "great" war ended. Easter, from the point of view of the Christian religion, is the anniversary of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if that ever occurred he must have been killed on a definite date and resurrected on a definite date. These are things that cannot take place over a lengthy period. A man must be killed once, and all at once. And if he gets up again after he is dead, then he must get up all at once. But the date of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not fixed by any exact date at all. Christians have an Easter Sunday celebration of the anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus, and that date is fixed—by the moon! It is fixed by the calendar full moon on or after March 21. And what has the moon to do with the death of an individual? There is a superstition which attributes madness to the influence of the moon, and we have that in the persistence of the word "lunacy." But the moon has nothing to do with the date of a man's death. It is quite clear that when we come across anything of this kind we have left the sphere of sober history and entered that of mythology.

So I think that the desire of a body of Christians to give Easter a fixed date all over the world is not for the public convenience, but only for the Church's profit. Here and there it must occur to even a dyed-

in-the-wool Christian "Why has not Jesus Christ a fixed date for his death as other people have?" And, granting a Christian with an enquiring turn of mind, once he begins to ask questions, who can tell where he will stop? He may discover that what he has been taking for real history is badly-garbled myth.

An Ancient Custom

A Christian who started asking why, if Jesus lived and died as do other men, the dates of his birth and death are not as are the births and deaths of other men might even go back a bit, and conclude that just as the death of Jesus is associated with the moon, his birth is, with equal plainness, connected with the Sun. Long before the name of the Christian Church was heard, thousands of years before, there were gods born on a date which represented the date of the rebirth of the Sun. The enquiring Christian would also discover that both dates, or their equivalents, are of tremendous importance to primitive peoples. The waning of the sun's heat means the decay of vegetation, and the approach of the long winter night. But there is a point at which the Sun rises higher in the heavens, and its welcome warmth is felt, not by man only, but by the earth and its inhabitants. There is the promise of food and health, and joyousness. That is why all over the world, in primitive times, men have hailed the rebirth of the Sun-god with joy, and why we to-day also welcome the growing strength of the sun and the promise it brings of a green and fruitful spring. The Christian would also find that the winter and the spring festival are indissolubly linked together. They are not the anniversaries of any living being's birth and death, they are the survivals of those far-away days when man vitalized the whole of nature, and created gods that were responsible for all the good and evil in his life.

If one could resurrect a number of men and women who lived long before the Christian Church was heard of, they would find nothing new in this spring festival of Easter. If they entered some of the Christian Churches, and found people rejoicing at the resurrection of the god or goddess of spring, they would find nothing at which to marvel. They would say that as Christians are celebrating the resurrection of the slain Jesus Christ, so did they celebrate the resurrection of the slain Adonis, or Tammuz. Even if people were to read the New Testament intelligently they would realize that it could have had nothing to do with the resurrection. For the Passover which Jesus is said to have attended was exactly the same Spring festival which was practised by nearly all other peoples. Even the very name of Easter is that of a Saxon god who was deposed by the god Jesus. The recurring phenomena of life and death are eternal; rejoicing at the victory of the life of nature over its apparent death during the winter has been going

on ever since uncivilized humanity began to seek to control nature in its own interests.

The early Christians did not deny this association with earlier beliefs. That could only be done when the people had passed through the same process that the masses of the German are now passing through by the agency of that figure head—Hitler, and his jailers, Goering & Co. It was by this Christian process of suppression and intellectual emasculation that Christians finally forgot the association of their religion with earlier ones and began to believe in the originality of their creed. The early Christians knew and admitted that their own mythology did not differ greatly from that around them or that which had preceded them. They did not denounce the pagan gods as non-existent, they declared them to be inferior, or without the saving power of their own deity. Hundreds of years had to pass before Christians arrived at the belief that the pagan Gods really did not exist and never had existed. And by the time that belief came about a great many were ready to lump the Christian gods in with the rest.

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#### An Historical Absurdity

Look at the time and ceremonies of Easter, and their nature is as plain as a pikestaff. There is the hot-cross bun. What on earth has that to do with the death of a great and revered teacher? But the round cake marked with the cross was a symbol of the Sun thousands of years before Jesus Christ. The egg as a symbol of life was common among the people of the pre-Christian world. And the rejoicing at Easter? Is that the way that one recalls the torture and crucifixion of one whom we revere and love? Do human beings generally commemorate the death of a parent or a child, or a wife or a husband, or a dear friend, by songs and dances and a general "bean-feast"? I think not. But restore Easter to its proper pagan setting and the proceedings become at least reasonable. Trying to introduce Christian mythology into sober history makes the whole thing ridiculous. Says Frazer:—

It is a remarkable coincidence that the Christian and the heathen festivals of the divine resurrection should have been solemnized at the same season and in the same place. For the places which celebrated the death of Christ at the Spring equinox were Phrygia, Gaul, and apparently Rome, that is, the very regions in which the worship of Attis either originated or struck deepest root. If the vernal equinox, the season of which in the temperate regions the whole face of nature testifies to a fresh outburst of vital energy, had been viewed from of old as the time when the world was created afresh in the resurrection of a god, nothing could have been more natural than to place the resurrection of the new deity at the same cardinal point of the year. . . .

In point of fact it appears from an anonymous Christian writing in the fourth century of our era, that Christians and Pagans alike were struck by the remarkable coincidence between their respective deities, and that the coincidence formed a bitter controversy between the adherents of the rival religions. . . . In these unseemly bickerings the heathen took what to a superficial observer might seem strong ground by arguing that their god was the older, and therefore presumably the original, not the counterfeit, since as a general rule the original is older than its copy. This feeble argument the Christians easily rebutted. They admitted that in point of time Jesus was the junior deity, but they triumphantly demonstrated his real seniority by falling back upon the subtlety of Satan, who on so important an occasion surpassed himself by inverting the order of nature.

#### And Little Lies Breed Bigger Lies

I agree with Gerald Massey that the absurdity began when the Christian Church adopted a mass of mythology, that was rapidly being taken by the educated world at its true value, turned it into history, and, in producing a false history, made the whole mythology of the ancient world eternally ridiculous. Intellectually Christianity represented the intellectual dregs of the ancient world. It converted lying into a virtue, and it took a mythology which in itself, and separated from the Christian Church and its teachings, still forms a source of pleasure in its fantasy and its harmless personification of natural forces and offered it as verifiable history. It is, thanks to the Christian Church, that what might have survived harmlessly has become in its perpetuation a source of the greatest of evils.

I am not surprised that there are many leaders in Christian Church who would like to adopt a fixed date for Easter. That might give the lie of a crucified God a little better chance of survival. An exact date could fit a human being, but a moveable date for the death of a God is a self-confessed piece of mythology. And, after all, that is only another step in the deceitful process of humanizing the whole figure of Jesus Christ. The primitive Christians cared little for Jesus the moral teacher and social leader. It was the Christ who saved their souls in the next world and who could protect them from hell, they valued. It was the Jesus of the latter part of the nineteenth century who hid his godhead and came forward as a social and moral reformer. That is the worst of a lie. It can live only by perpetuating further lies.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

#### A Bishop who was Lynched

"The fact that a believer is happier than a sceptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one."—Bernard Shaw.

THE lives of the saints and the writings of the early Christian Fathers make very curious reading in the twentieth century. Not only do they exude the musty smell of the cloister, but there is something unreal and even morbid about them. Yet, to our innocent and believing ancestors, these legendary saints were almost real. They were entwined with the national history. Saint Andrew was associated with Scotland, Saint Patrick with Ireland, and Saint George with England. The very name was used as a war-cry, and men went to battle with the cry of "St George for England" on his lips. Who was this Saint George? Gibbon identified the figure with George of Cappadocia. Here is an account of this saintly sinner as penned by Emerson in his *English Traits*:—

George of Cappadocia, born at Epephania, in Cilicia, was a low parasite, who got a lucrative contract to supply the army with bacon. A rogue and informer, he got rich, and was forced to run from justice. He saved his money, embraced Arianism, collected a library, and got promoted by a faction to the episcopal throne of Alexandria. When Julian came, A.D. 361, George was dragged to prison. The prison was burst open by a mob, and George was lynched as he deserved. And this precious knave became in good time Saint George of England, patron of chivalry, emblem of victory and civility, and the pride of the best blood of the modern world.

This is all very sad, but this picturesque Saint George possesses two distinctly different personalities. Whether we identify the "saint" with the scoundrelly army-contractor of Alexandria, or the

traditional figure with the same name, he is no more satisfactory than Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The chief exploit of the purely imaginary "other fellow" is the slaying of the dragon. Sane people regard this as a mere fabulous invention, such as the stories of Perseus and the sea-monster, Apollo and the python, Bellerophon and the chimera, and many another legend. This dissolves this peculiarly Christian saint as a solar myth. It also disposes of him as the Christian crusader, champion of chivalry, and patron saint of England.

The ecclesiastical figure of "Saint George" is as extraordinary as any mentioned in the Christian Bible. The stories told of this "saint" are as imaginative as they are numerous, and serve to show to what depths of imbecility human credulity can sink. This "saint" was, we are told, killed no less than three times, actually reviving on two occasions. Among the trifling things that happened to him were that he was roasted and beaten with rods, crushed with rocks, beheaded, and thrown to wild animals; coming to life again, he was sawn in pieces. These fragments were thrown into boiling pitch, but he again came to life, being finally and mercifully despatched by being broken to pieces on a wheel.

What has all this sacred nonsense to do with England, or even with common sense? Only in one fable is this saint described as having even visited England. If some patriotic Christians really believe that the alleged decrees of their particular deity are affected by such a thing as saintly intervention, of what use is his composite Saint George? Is he not one of the patron saints of Germany and Austria as well as England?

There is no getting out of the dilemma. "Saint George," either as Dr. Jekyll or as Mr. Hyde, is one of the most complete and outrageous shams from which soft-hearted and soft-headed folks sought to extract religious sentiment. The silly legends associated with his name may appear as true as the four Gospels to the unfettered and credulous members of the Greek and Roman Churches at the other end of Europe, but what concern have decent citizens in England with the fraudulent army-contractor of Alexandria, or with the central figure in a solar myth? Every schoolboy should know that Saint George's vogue came to this country with the Crusades, though the legend was retailed long before. As a Protestant country, we do not need a patron-saint at all, and Roman Catholic ecclesiastics must rub their hands with glee when they recall that a saint still figures on our gold coinage and banknotes.

Custom makes cowards of far too many people, but it is no use pretending that the bulk of people in a civilized country can be made to care for an entirely meaningless blend of classic myth and deceased Capadocian. Why not throw over the whole silly farce? So far from recommending any citizen to wear an artificial rose in honour of a still more artificial saint, we suggest that it would be a kindness to strew the poppy of forgetfulness over the grave of the saintly-sinner of Alexandria. A cynical critic might be disposed to liken the story of England's soldier saint to a purple patch from the earlier books of the Christian Bible, or a succulent page from the *Newgate Calendar*. The alleged patron saint of England, like so many sacred heroes, is a sham, and there is an end of it.

This child-like belief in saints is passing wonderful in adult men and women. In the ages of ignorance and faith it was almost everywhere prevalent. To study it closely is to essay an inquiry into the psychology of a crowd, and an ignorant one at that. Let there be no mistake on this point. Most believers in saints and saintly intercession are Roman Catholics,

and, in the main, these people are ignorant. They are not allowed to read any books or publications unless their Church approves. The *Index Expurgatorius* itself contains the name of almost every publication worth reading. Catholic believers are told that by reading heretical books and periodicals they are in actual danger of eternal damnation, and their Church still preaches a hell of literal fire, just as their priests have done for nearly twenty centuries.

So obedient are the faithful, that even colporteurs of Protestant Bible Societies are ill-treated in Catholic countries, for a zealous Romanist will no more read a Protestant version of the Christian Bible than he would read the works of Voltaire or Thomas Paine. Indeed, if a Catholic young man attends a Free-thought lecture, he sins more grievously than if he stole money from his own mother.

In close analysis, it will be seen that this credulity and ignorance is carefully fostered by priests by means of religious instruction in schools. The little scholars are taught that the clergy are sacred persons, and that the Christian Bible is infallible. This is true of Protestants and Catholics alike. The early impressions are almost indelible. Even in after life, when the Oriental fables are but half-believed and half forgotten, the allusions have a familiar ring. In this control of education the priests have demonstrated their clever strategy. By roping-in the children in each generation, the Christian clergy feather their nests comfortably for yet another period. The only real and lasting solution of the difficulty lies in the secularization of education. Until we rid ourselves of the priestly influence in our schools, we shall never be entirely civilized, for whilst these clerical reactionaries are in power we shall continue to be in the shadow of Medievalism, with all that it implies of ignorance and intolerance. Until we get rid of the priest in education, we can never make the lives of our children more intelligent, more useful, more beautiful than our own. The children are the future citizens of this nation, and, from a scientific point of view, it is difficult to find the difference between the Christian clergy and African witch-doctors.

MIMNERMUS.

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## Down, Demos, Down!

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TOM: Well, I know what's what as well as another; and I am as fit to govern as any other man.

Jack: No, Tom, No. You are indeed as good as any man seeing that you have hands to work and a soul to be saved. But are all men fit for all kinds of things? Everyone in his way, says I. I am a better judge of a horse-shoe than the squire, but he has a deal better opinion of State affairs than I; and I can do no more without his employ than he can do without me, Jack the Blacksmith.

Tom: But, I say all men are equal. Why should one be above another?

Jack: If that is thy talk, Tom, thou dost quarrel with Providence, not with Government. For the woman is below her husband, the child below the parent, the servant below the master, the scholar below the master, the scholar below the teacher.

Tom: But that is no reason why I should be below the Queen. Governments are bad, and I have made up my mind not to pay any more taxes to them.

Jack: Tom, Tom, if you had been oftener to the House of God you'd know where it is said, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's"; and also, "Fear God; honour the king." Bad folks tell you, and that bad paper tells you different from this, I know, but my book, the Bible, says to me: "Let

everyone be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God; whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God." You say you'll pay no more taxes! Have you forgotten that Jesus Christ when he was upon earth worked a miracle that he might have money to pay a tax with, rather than set you and me an example of disobedience to Governments? An example worth a hundred precepts, of which the wit of man can never lessen the value. Then there's another worth mention. When St. Paul bid men in his days obey the king and submit to his laws, what sort of king, think you, had they? A right good one, a saint, do you think?

Tom: Why a kind, merciful, charitable king to be sure, who put nobody to death or in prison.

Jack: You were never more out in your life. Our minister says he was as bad as could be—he robbed the rich and killed the poor—he set fire to his own town, as fine a place as London—fiddled to the flames, and then hanged and burned the Christians, who were all poor, as if they had burnt the town. Yet St. Paul says not a word about rising, only obey, submit, submit, obey. Duties are fixed, Tom, laws are settled: a Christian can't choose whether he'll obey or let it alone. And if they were not fixed, we have no such trials. Our Queen is a right good young creature, kind as kind can be.

Tom: I say we never shall be happy till we do as all the world have done.

Jack: The people of foreign lands and we contending for liberty, Tom, is just as if you and I were to pretend to run a race, you to set off from the starting point when I am in already; you to have all the ground to travel when I have reached the end. Why, we've got it man! We're there already! Our constitution is no more like the constitutions of foreign nations than a pint of our best brewed ale is like sour vinegar.

Tom: Well, I know we shall go to the dogs if we can't turn things upside down and get a new charter, that's all!

Jack: And I know we shall go to the dogs if we do. I don't know much about politics, but this I do know, if men and women are not well to do in England, it's for the most part their own fault. A steady, honest-going Englishman may mostly keep a roof over his head, and have a soft bed to lie down upon, and clothe himself and feed his children, and keep all about him respectable, and save a few shillings a year too if he likes, enough to make a rich man of him in the end; and what more can we want?

Tom: Well, still, as the old saying is—I should like to do as they do in France.

Jack: And have all the shops shut up, and all the markets empty; have the mills all stopped, and the workshops all deserted; put an end to all credit, and have everybody afraid of stirring out of doors; talk of equality, and have everybody starving; talk of fraternity, and have everybody trying to knock out everybody's brains. Pretty goings on to have in England!

Tom: But you said yourself they might have been in a bad way over the water before they took to turning things upside down.

Jack: And what's that to us? Because neighbour Jones t'other day pull'd down a crazy old barn, is that a reason why I should set my tight cottage on fire?

Tom: I don't see for all that why one man is to ride about in his carriage and four, while another mends the highway for him.

Jack: I don't see why the man in the coach is to drive over the man on foot, or hurt a hair of his head,

any more than you. As to our great folks, that you levellers have such a spite against, I don't pretend to say they are a bit better than they should be; but that's no affair of mine: let them look to that: they'll answer for that in another place. But if they have money, I will say this for them, they don't hoard it up—away it goes, and everybody's the better for it! They do spend too much to be sure in feasting and fine clothes, but so much the better for us; the money comes among the people. Their coaches, and houses, and furniture, their planting, and feasting, and smartening, employ a power of tradesmen and labourers. Just tell me in this place what should we do without the gentry? They bring a lot of company here with more horses than I can shoe; a lot of washing, more than my wife can get up; they take our grown children and make servants of them, and rare wages and good food do they get. Our boys get something every day by scaring crows, and weeding the gardens, and the girls go to their schools, and get a good education, to a Sunday School beside and all this for nothing we may almost say, for what's the matter of a penny or two a week for such advantages.

Tom: Very true, Jack, but there's not a Squire like ours in every village.

Jack: The more's the pity.

I am not guilty of the above. The extracts are taken from *Village Politics*, a series of tracts which circulated by the million at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They were written by Hannah More, a lady whose piety and general kindness were beyond doubt. They received the encomiums of the gentry and the Church. The Bishops were particularly eulogistic. The Bishop of London of that day (Bishop Porteus), spoke of them as follows:—

She is diffusing among the lower orders of the people an infinity of little religious tracts, calculated to reform and comfort them in the world, and to save them in the next. . . . Of the above-mentioned little tracts, no less than two millions were sold in the first year, and they contributed, I am persuaded, very essentially to counteract the poison of those impious and immoral pamphlets which were dispersed over the kingdom in such numbers by societies of infidels and republicans.

Hannah More's period was 1745 to 1833. She just survived the passing of the Reform Bill, which conceded so much, in spite of all her efforts, to the wicked *Chartists*. She was the close friend of Garrick and his wife, and mixed with Johnson, Walpole, Burke, and many of the Bishops. Mr. Leonard Woolf in his *After the Deluge* (Pelican Books 6d.) uses Hannah More as an illustration of his thesis that:—

Democracy is essentially irreligious and anti-Christian because of its fundamental tenet with regard to the importance of, and equal right to, human happiness.

Hannah More becomes really important to students if viewed in this connexion, and a study of this lady whose politics and religion were one, is of value to all those who are curious or sceptical of the modern religious claims as to the Church's historical interest in the secular improvements of the people.

T. H. ELSTON.

We call men *dangerous* whose minds are made differently from our own, and *immoral* those who profess another standard of ethics. We condemn as *sceptics* all who do not share our own illusions, without ever troubling our heads to inquire if they have others of their own.

Anatole France.

## "Essays in Freethinking": A Review

On page 65 of the latest volume of *Essays in Freethinking*, the author has supplied a key to the series in a single phrase. Speaking of some extracts from the Bible that he has paraphrased, he says they are "expressed exactly as a man of to-day would see them if he came in contact with them for the first time. . . ." That hits off his attitude to Christianity as a whole, and indicates the standpoint from which the *Essays* are written. Mr. Cohen makes no secret of the reason for this. He is too keen a student of science in general, and psychology in particular, to claim to be a man thinking free of his environment. The truth is, as he tells us later in the book, that he never had religion, and he is therefore the "man of to-day" whom he pictures. This freedom from religious prepossessions, while it does not imply that he has no prepossessions, has nevertheless been an impetus to the free play of a mind already strong in originality, and has reinforced the individual quality of his thinking in all directions.

Towards religion he has developed a deep antipathy, and makes no bones about it. When he explains Christianity, it is not to excuse but to assail it. Thus when we find him viewing the social background of Christendom, it is not as one seeking to reconcile the contradictions in modern religious thought by a sympathetic reference to their heredity, but as one eager to expose a humiliating anachronism. Not having been "Christianized" he is able to approach the national religion as a foreigner, and his book has the piquancy attached to all impressions through the eyes of a foreigner. Were it not for the prejudice bred by Christian training, the religious world would receive this book with the same lively interest felt by the average Britisher in, say, a Frenchman's account of English ways and customs. In that sense, therefore, the *Essays* form a series chiefly appropriate for Christian reading, but it is too much to expect that they will be generally accepted in this light.

Many will feel that Mr. Cohen is a harsh critic of religion because he has not a good word to say for it. It is true he has not; but those who think he should have will be hard put to it to repel his attack. His detached view brings out with embarrassing clearness the degree to which the Christian mind has to be distorted in order not to see things the way he sees them. "If he came in contact with them for the first time" turns out to be a devilish test for any man to apply to Christian beliefs.

But the impression must not be created that the *Essays* are all upon religious topics. True the majority are, and there runs through the book a thread of religious controversy. But the author has turned aside from this, and we meet with essays as varied as a reply to Bernard Shaw's account of some secular doings about the time of Bradlaugh's secession; a piece of purely philosophic writing; some well chosen reflections on reformers in general; meditations on things great and small; a little gem on the subject of the late G. K. Chesterton, and a short essay round the death of George V. that must certainly have been the most unusual journalistic contribution of the time. And in all the essays I am reminded of a comment I made long ago on reading the first of the series: "Why call these *Essays in Freethinking*? They are simply *Essays in Thinking*." That, when all is said and done, is the secret of their fascination, at least for one reader. Mr. Cohen has a knack of leading one's mind on without effort, and the explanation is not far

to seek. It lies, I think, in the fact that his writing is the least compiled of any I know. Strange though it may sound, Mr. Cohen is not a writer in the accepted sense. Writing is not his trade, and he has never learned its tricks as tricks of a trade. Mr. Cohen writes only when he has not the opportunity of talking, and I feel quite sure he would at all times rather talk than write. He once expressed to me his amusement at the idea that anyone should set apart a time for meditation—should, as he humorously put it, go away somewhere in order to "have a think." Mr. Cohen confesses that he does his thinking mostly in conversation, or, in default of this, in writing. The consequence is that his writing, like his conversation, is not the result of any building and planning, but is the actual process of his thought placed on record. This gives it a freshness and a spontaneity to be had no other way. Even his style is developed along the same lines. Fortunately, as I think, he is without the customary grounding in "composition." Neither at a school nor at a university was he taught how to dress up his thoughts to make them familiar guests in conventional literary society. Such conventional forms as he has acquired have been absorbed unconsciously in the course of prodigious reading, but without the tutor at his shoulder picking and choosing for him. Thus his style is peculiarly his own, for it is nothing more nor less than the direct expression of his thought processes. His manner is inseparable from his matter. If at times we miss the writing of, say, a Santayana, whose manner is a cultivated piece of art, in which we rejoice without regard to his matter, we are compensated by the fact that there is nothing to beguile us from the direct impact of what our author has to say. Possibly this was the feature which caused Eddington to remark on the clearness of Mr. Cohen's writing, and the compelling effect it had in drawing forth a reply. But that is not to say that Mr. Cohen has no ear for the music of language. At times the reader will meet with bursts of rhetoric that may surprise him. But they come as expressions of the author's feeling and not as exhibitions of a writer's virtuosity.

In spite of Mr. Cohen's recent attack on bedtime books, I throw down the gauntlet by calling the *Essays* bedtime reading. For many of us bedtime is not sleep time, nor is it the time of lazy-mindedness. It is a time of quiet and seclusion, when the bustle of the day is over and the shaded bed-lamp throws a restful, yellow light on the reclining form stretched upon the cool, resilient sheet. It is a time when we have not very long to be awake yet long enough; when, for the time being, we do not wish to sleep, but rather to relax the spirit and enjoy something different from the daily round; when, before Morpheus beckons us into the darkness in which, for a spell, we forgo the unique pleasure of existence, we may enjoy the richness of being alive yet unharrassed; that is the hour when we shall turn to the *Essays*. We shall wish to have a pleasure that is completed; we shall hope to be disturbed neither by the unwelcome intruder nor by the break that will surely come if we have settled to a work of impossible length. In the *Essays* we shall find what we are looking for. There will be a series of natural pauses admirably suited to our needs, and we can rest assured that there is no danger, with Mr. Cohen's writing in our hands, of reading ourselves to sleep.

MEDICUS.

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The simple diminution of the freedom of the press is enough to diminish the stature of a people.

Victor Hugo.

## Luther Burbank's Tribute to Charles Darwin

"My lifelong adherence to the scientific principles enunciated by Charles Darwin was not the result of any hasty acceptance of his soundness. In fact, some of his theories I seriously doubted, from my own slight experience. But as time went on I had greater and greater opportunities of putting his theories to the test of garden bed and field row, and the older I have grown the more firmly have I been convinced that he was the master and that all the others were mere pupils, like myself."

The foregoing quotation is from *The Harvest of the Years*, by Luther Burbank, foremost among the benefactors of the world in the increased beauty and productivity that were the result of his experiments and achievements with flowers and shrubs, with fruits and trees, and with vegetables. His selective powers—sometimes preserving one plant among thousands—were merely one of the facets of his genius. By an extension of his process, he held, the productivity of the world could be doubled. "Nature requires variations, change, development, growth." Such, in his own words, were the principles along which he worked; and never within his sphere has there appeared anyone to dispute his towering pre-eminence.

Enlightening it is to learn from Burbank himself that Darwin was the determining influence of his life.

"I had," he writes, in reference to his early years, "got hold of an early book of his, *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*. It opened a new world to me. It told me, in plain simple sentences, as matter-of-fact—as though its marvellous and startling truths were commonplaces—that variations came from cross-breeding, and that these variations seemed to be susceptible, through selection, of permanent fixture in the individual. While I had been struggling along with my experiments, blundering on half-truths and truths, the great master had been reasoning out causes and effects for me, and setting them down in orderly fashion, easy to understand, and having an immediate bearing on my work.

"I doubt if it is possible to make anyone realize what this book meant to me.

"Big as the book was, and significant as it was to me, its influence over me was heightened, and its lure for me was increased by the uproar with which its theories were received. In 1859 Darwin had published *The Origin of Species*, and just when *The Variations of Plants and Animals Under Domestication* was stirring me all up, he shook the world with his *Descent of Man*. Almost immediately the storm broke, especially in the New England churches and homes. The theory that man had descended from an ancestry common to that of the apes—Darwin never said anything about his descending from monkeys—was blasphemous, scurrilous, infamous, and other things even worse! Darwin was banned from the churches and from most homes, and those who read him were considered as bad as he was.

"Perhaps I was always 'fernist the Government,' as they say.

"At any rate, the man everyone was discussing—and most of them were damning—was, for that very reason, interesting to me; and the controversy—a rather one-sided one in our neighbourhood, I remember, since there were few to defend him—only served to inflame my interest in every word he wrote. The blows his personality and phrases struck on my sensitive mind were steady, sharp, and persistent. My New England heredity was outweighed by the pressure of my environment—the talk of California,

the fury against Darwin, and his clear and illuminating book; and I pushed out and away."

Burbank thereupon went to Santa Rosa (California).

There, his efforts were directed to such purpose, that in 1893 he had "a bombshell to explode"—the publication of a catalogue, bearing the title "New Creations in Fruits and Flowers." Listed in this were new quinces, plums, and prunes; a number of new flowers and new berries; and "an offering of vegetables of new variety and productivity." "The fruits and flowers mentioned in this list and to be mentioned in succeeding lists," it was explained, "are more than new in the ordinary sense in which the word is generally used. They are new creations, lately produced by scientific combinations of Nature's forces, guided by long, carefully conducted, and very expensive biological study. Let not any suppose that they were born without labour; they are not foundlings; but are exemplifications of the knowledge that the life forces of plants may be combined and guided to produce results not imagined by horticulturists who have given the matter little thought."

The reference to new creations brought Burbank, in a measure, the execrations that had been experienced by Darwin.

"I could see and did see," he writes, "that the term would be examined critically; but it had not occurred to me that it would be considered blasphemous. Not that it would have caused me to use other words, if I had foreseen the storm. I have never been one to consider how my utterances would be received by others, so long as I felt convinced that what I said was sound, scientific, and accurate. I didn't think much about the matter from this viewpoint, to tell the truth, because I was so absorbed in the importance of my work, and the necessity of impressing horticulturists with the significance of what I had accomplished. I spoke up and said my say, and then I went back to my job.

"It presently seemed possible that I was going to have a good deal of difficulty staying there.

"A perfect storm arose, in the heat and wind of which I was called a good many names stronger than blasphemer. I was preached about, talked at, written, telegraphed, scolded, abused, and even vilified. The more extreme of my critics said that I was setting myself up as a competitor of Omnipotence, and the mildest of them called me a falsifier. One preacher inveigled me into his church, had me seated in a front pew, and then worked up a trap for me by which I had to say just what I believed as to the truth of metaphysical and superstitious theories concerning creation. When he had me, as he thought, in a fine bag, with the draw-strings pulled, he proceeded to berate me in good old orthodox style, and ended by offering a prayer for my awakening. Of course I had neither thought nor said anything either impious or blasphemous, unless it is impious and blasphemous to work with Nature, utilize her laws, direct her work, apply intelligence to plastic forms, and then claim a victory in getting useful and beautiful results. But it was lively while it lasted!"

A magazine-writer once gave a story of Burbank's work and methods the title, *Burbank Versus Nature*.

"I can't," explains Burbank, "remember anything that made me quite so hot under the collar as that caption. It was something like writing a treatise called *Wilbur and Orville Wright versus the Law of Gravitation*.

This leads me to a concluding quotation—a quotation in which Burbank, side by side with expressing himself scientifically and philosophically, clearly revealed his rationalistic outlook.

"Let me," he proceeds, "be clearly understood as regards this great force of influence I wrote of so often in those chapters as Nature. I have used the capital initial for emphasis, and because I have tried to be interesting, and give my story at least one principal character or heroine; but in doing this I may have been guilty of leading some of my readers astray, in my own belief as to her dominance of our world as we know it and are a part of it.

"In the first place, it is only figuratively that I speak of Nature as a personality or an entity.

"Nature is not personal, any more than her manifestations in law and operation are personal. She is compounded of all those processes which move through the universe to effect the results we know as Life, and of all the ordinances which govern that universe and make Life continuous. She is no more the Hebrews' Jehovah than she is the physicist's force; she is as much Providence as she is Electricity; she is not The Great Pattern any more than she is Blind Chance. These are but names we give her according to the concept of her we are trying to express. It is impossible for the mind of man to grasp much except what he can realize through his five senses. Therefore, we have long since contracted the habit of apostrophizing forces and powers and elements we cannot define or analyse. For this reason the impelling force behind Life as we know it we speak of as Nature.

"Natural laws and operations and processes are in fact entirely impersonal.

"To our little minds some of the things Nature does are cruel, ruthless, wasteful, or even wrong, just as, to our imperfect visions, she appears sometimes beneficent, kindly, sympathetic, and helpful. Yet in both we are mistaken, for Nature just takes as much cognisance of the deadly snake as of the greatest statesman; she gives no more thought to the baby in your arms than she does to the menacing typhoid bacilli on the foot of that fly that is crawling toward the baby's lips; she is jealous of the dainty flower in your garden just as much as, and no more than, she is jealous of the scorpion that hides at its base, or the murderous renegade who waits for his prey in the shadow of the garden wall.

"To her the flea, the cockroach, the hyena, the buzzard, the leopard, the cobra, are as important as the dog who loves and guards you, the young girl in her lover's embrace, the child at its mother's knee in prayer, or the mature man on whom depend the happiness and well-being of a gracious wife and a family of loving children.

"Our egotism has always tried to squirm out from under this self-evident truth, and we have, from the beginning of conscious thought, and the first glimmerings of reason in the human mind, tried to sugarcoat the fact with superstitious legends, stories, tales, and religious parables and teachings.

"We don't like to admit that we—'a little lower than the angels'—are no more important to Nature than the mosquito that stings us or the lightning flash that destroys us, and our poets and theologians have invented pleasing fables that give us a sense of superiority, and help us to believe that we are the favourites of the universe and immune to the operation of some of the laws.

"But down in our hearts we know that this isn't the fact. If we reason about it a little, we will see that the only advantage we have is the advantage of being better equipped, through gradual growth and development in past ages, to meet life, and to conquer our natural enemies in life. To my way of thinking we cannot too soon rid ourselves of superstitions in this respect.

"I have learned from Nature that dependence on unnatural beliefs weakens us in the struggle and shortens our breath for the race, and that it is only by learning about Nature and her laws—and by applying our knowledge to the end that we are better equipped to obey and take advantage of those laws—that we can actually make ourselves masters of life and winners in the great battle."

In a preface to *The Harvest of the Years*, Wilbur Hall says that Burbank grew "increasingly impatient with bigotry and superstition as his own first-hand acquaintance with Nature and science" developed; that he felt that "the time had come for honest men to denounce false teachers and attack false gods"; and that he lies "under a cedar in the yard of the old homestead in which he lived for forty years, and on the grounds of which he did most of his revolutionary and incalculably valuable work for his fellow-man."

FRANK HILL.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

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## Acid Drops

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We have before warned Freethinkers against the policy of being led in the train of a specific anti-Catholic campaign, and one which deliberately refrains from criticizing Protestantism, thus creating an impression that in some way the latter stands as a champion of freedom. It is not merely Roman Catholicism that acts as enemy to Freethought. It is Christianity as a whole, and on a wider survey, religion as a whole against which we war. An example of this is seen in the agitation against the International Freethought Conference in September next. The wider agitation against this being permitted is now being carried on in Church of England groups. Week by week we receive a batch of cuttings reporting Church meetings asking the Home Secretary to prohibit the meeting in September as "an act of blasphemy against God, of disloyalty to the King as Defender of the Faith, of treason to the constitution and a grave menace to the whole of the British Empire." (This comes from a resolution passed at the Ingworth Ruri-decanal Church Conference at which, in addition to laymen, 18 of the clergy were present).

Of course this is rubbish, but it shows what would happen if the Protestant clergy of this country could command events. The Home Secretary has no power whatever to prohibit any such Congress as that which will take place, the King's religion is selected for him and not by him, and, as the case of Edward VIII. showed, if he openly neglected his religion he might even lose his post. It would certainly go if he openly professed Freethought or Roman Catholicism. And as to the Congress being against the British Constitution, it would be interesting to know where the British Constitution exists which contains a prohibition of any Congress. The "British Constitution" consists in a series of rules and customs and precedents, and among these rules and precedents is the one which does not ban any gathering save such as may be decided to be against the public well-being and the maintenance of order. But in a religious gathering one must expect a display of ignorance, and one usually gets it. We must qualify the last statement to the extent of saying that the ignorance need not be among the clergy; it is enough, if it is among the lay part of the gathering, for the clergy to exploit it.

That stupidity in high places encourages stupidity in lower places is illustrated in many of the results of the 1932 Sunday Entertainments Act, probably the most stupid piece of legislation of the most stupid Parliament England has had for a long time. (The 1936 Education Act with its denominational school grants, and the Public Order Act are not stupid; they are merely

vicious, and of their class quite clever.) Under the 1932 Entertainment Act, cinema-owners are allowed to open on a Sunday evening, provided they are willing to be blackmailed into handing over a certain proportion of the proceeds to charity. At Warrington (Lancs.) recently—mark the facts—the Watch Committee gave permission for nine cinemas to open on a Sunday evening on condition that 10 per cent of the profits went to the local Cancer Fund. The nine cinemas opened! the figures of the takings were audited by the Borough Treasurer; and the agreed 10 per cent went to the Cancer Fund—£25 19s. 5d.

The local Cancer Fund Committee, who had apparently reckoned on a nice picking of the pockets of the cinema-owners and the public, were annoyed because their rake-off was so small; and when the matter came up at the Town Council meeting, the stupidities tumbled over one another. Councillor J. H. B. Wigginton considered the swag so paltry that he thought "future facilities should be severely scrutinized"; but that stupidity was soon beaten by Councillor J. T. Cooper (deputy Mayor), who as Vice-chairman of the Cancer Committee, warned the Council how great was the Committee's "resentment" at getting only £26 for nothing at other people's expense. But then came Alderman Roberts, and the prize for the biggest stupidity of the show became his straight away. "These people," he declared, "are prostituting the cause of charity for personal gain. . . . They have entirely broken faith in the cause of charity." Alderman Roberts (as far as the reports show) did not offer to give 10 per cent of his own weekly income to the Cancer Fund.

Be it noted that the cinemas, if they open at all on Sundays, have got to open "in the cause of charity." Further, that the agreement under which the 10 per cent went to the Cancer Fund was arranged by the Watch Committee. Obviously there was no breach of faith by the cinemas, as had to be emphasized at the Council meeting in reply to the wild statements made. But there was no criticism of the 10 per cent agreement made by the Watch Committee, and the opposition centred on the smallness of the amount received by the Cancer Fund. Assuming £25 19s. 5d. as 10 per cent of the profits, each of the nine cinemas also would have got only £25 19s. 5d. from the evening, which does not seem an exorbitant return for the trouble involved. Presumably if the Cancer Fund had been sent £100 as its 10 per cent rake off, all would have been well and no criticism heard, but in that case the nine cinemas would have had £900 between them instead of £230. Would Alderman Roberts have considered that "prostitution"? But then, of course, one does not expect stupid aldermen and councillors to think along rational lines; if they did, they would not be stupid.

The parishioners at Manston, Cross gates, Leeds, objected to their Anglo-Catholic vicar preparing their children for confirmation. The Bishop of Ripon rebuked them by quoting a passage from the Word of God, in which Jesus dealt with St. John who had forbidden "one casting out devils in Thy Name" because "he followeth not us." Jesus said "Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us." The parishioners retaliated by more utterances from the mouth of God: "He that entereth not by the door into the sheep fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." This is where the blessing of a Revelation comes in. We would never have these disputes settled if it were not for the clear, unmistakable, utterances of God himself.

The Rev. W. E. Saugster, M.A. is surprised to find that Christians seem to be ashamed to advocate their own religion. He considers:—

It is an amazing mystery that a convinced Fascist or Communist can argue and plead for his nostrum with passion, while Christians walk about under some Trappist vow of silence, and hide their glad good news like a guilty secret. Perhaps the Christians are not convinced.

This seems a reasonable explanation, although we are bound to say our experience is that whether there is any real "conviction" about it or not, most Christians make a dreadful noise in the world. They would like to condemn to eternal silence the merest expression of opposition to their "guilty secrets."

In a memorandum, the Church Assembly graciously recognizes the approach of Summer Time. Though the Assembly thinks the Victorian Sunday was painted in darker colours than it deserved, it allows that in these days there is time for physical recreation without neglecting "the 're-creation' of the spirit." A pretty twist of the word "recreation," and a broadminded "concession" to the public taste! The holy ones continue to "grant" what they cannot deny!

Canon Rogers has been writing in the *Telegraph*, that although Church Reunion is God's Will, it is not practical politics. The ways of God it is evident must commend themselves to the ways of Men. Spotting the particular formula for getting to heaven has always been a favourite pastime of the pious, and it is only the special bonus for their smartness which lends the game its attractiveness.

In *Problems of To-day*, the Rev. Professor I. W. Grensted writes of "Goodness Without God." One would imagine that Goodness was good—with or without other qualities. Prof. Grensted, as becomes a "D.D.," and a Christian journalist, naturally prefers the Goodness which is Godliness. But he states what he calls "the Atheist outlook" frankly and fairly as follows:—

Why bother with God? Even if we do believe in His existence we never find that He really makes any difference. All that his commands come to in the end is that we must do our best, and we are doing that already. Why waste time over vague speculations about Him? Let us get on with the job.

That sounds like common sense.

What unconscious humour the tame religious 'poets' do perpetrate to be sure! Take "J.M."—the *Peoples'* regular afflatus, who gurgles of "scented stars," Easter chimes sounding like "angels' glad heart-beats," bushes like "altars," "thorns" pointing silver flames, and of "He Who Died to Give us Easter"; (what a strain on printers' capitals these "divine" expressions can be!) Still, the humanizing of religion proceeds apace; angels with anatomical hearts and Christ crucified to "make a British holiday," are ideas more in keeping with the thoughts of confectionery-egg manufacturers, hot-cross bun makers, transport shareholders and seaside landladies at this time of year.

## Fifty Years Ago

The sudden death of Matthew Arnold leaves a decided gap in English literature. As poet, critic and essayist his place among men of letters was unique. . . .

Alike as poet and critic he deserved the honoured name of Freethinker. His shortcomings are easily explained. They are survivals—the natural shrinkings of a mind educated in ecclesiasticism when brought face to face with the more bracing thought of the world outside. In his *Last Essays on Church and Religion* he says:—

"The partisans of traditional religion in this country do not know, I think, how decisively the whole force of progressive and liberal opinion on the Continent has pronounced against the Christian religion. They do not know how surely the whole force of progressive and liberal opinion in this country tends to follow, so far as traditional religion is concerned, the opinion of the Continent. They dream of patching up things unmendable, of retaining what can never be retained, of stopping change at a point where it can never be stopped."

*The Freethinker*, April 22, 1888.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

To Advertising and Circulating the *Freethinker*.—D. Fisher, 4s.

A. J. DUNN.—We have had many letters concerning the late W. J. W. Rasterbrook. He stood high in the estimation of all who knew him.

M. G. WILSON.—To adopt the old song, another copy of the *Freethinker* won't do anyone harm, and may easily do good.

H. SHARP.—Shall be writing on the subject soon; We have received a number of letters from 50-year readers, but are expecting many more.

K. B. COLE (Burnham).—Among the "interests" that are threatened by the creation of a healthy Sunday, your Minister forgets to mention the Church and its collection-boxes.

Jack BARTON.—Very pleased to hear from you. Will deal with cutting next week. It's easier to talk of taking things easily than to follow the advice. There is so much to do, and the older we get the more we find needs doing. But we do take all reasonable care. It would be unkind to our many friends if we did not.

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.

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.

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.

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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, 3/0.

## Sugar Plums

We again call the special attention of all concerned to the Annual Conference of the N.S.S., which takes place at Glasgow, at Whitsuntide—June 4, 5 and 6. This Conference bids fair to be one of the most interesting of recent years, and it is important that the gathering should be a large and representative one. For the moment we wish to impress the necessity for all those who wish to be present at the Civic Reception given to the Conference by the Lord Provost and Corporation of Glasgow on the evening of June 6, that their names and addresses must reach the office of the Lord Provost not later than May 4. Scottish members must, in the first instance, send their names to the Secretary of the Glasgow Branch, Mrs. M. Whitefield, 351 Castlemilk Road, Glasgow, S. Others will send their names to the General Secretary, 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

When such great pains is being taken to hide Jesus Christ the god-incarnate behind Jesus the alleged social reformer, a pamphlet such as the reprint of G. W. Foote's *Will Christ Save Us?* should prove of great use. G. W. Foote was one of the best writers, if not the best, the N.S.S. ever had. He had a first-hand knowledge of English literature at its best, and his writings com-

manded the warm admiration of men such as George Meredith, Sir Richard Burton, and William Kingdon Clifford. *Will Christ Save Us?* is written with a superb clarity and unmistakable force. We know of no single pamphlet that so well and so completely exposes the absurdities that go to the make-up of Jesus-the-social-and-moral-reformer nonsense than this one. The price is twopence, or by post twopence halfpenny.

Here is a letter which reaches us from Motherwell, sent by Mr. J. Tait:—

I have come across a remarkable case of a young man who is an Atheist, but who had never heard of the *Freethinker*. I am enclosing his name and address for your offer of four free copies.

The case is not quite so remarkable as Mr. Tait assumes. There are very many if our readers who do not let it be known—because of what they think adequate reasons—that they subscribe to this paper, and newsagents do not display it publicly, although it may be ordered through any newsagent. There is all the more reason for our friends who wish to give a little real help, either subscribing for an extra copy, which may be used to advertise this paper, or to send us the names and addresses, with stamps for postage and we will see to the rest. But there are enough potential readers in the country to free us from all financial worries if they could only be roped-in. And it is not work, but worry that takes most out of a man—or woman.

We had a pleasant recall to some very early memories on reading the following passage from Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence's *My Part in a Changing World*. It is taken from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*:—

For the first time in my life I tasted that wonderful experience when the printed words leave the page and become an infusion in the blood, making the heart beat faster and transporting the imagination to some other sphere of existence.

We must have been about seventeen when we had our first reading of *Sartor*, and we can still recall something of the state that Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence recalls. For a young man in those days, eager for a deeper and a stronger grasp on life, *Sartor* was a great book and even to-day, when so much that has happened has put a deal of the book "out-of-date," as it is called, it should still be read with interest and profit by anyone whose taste for literature and philosophy can get higher than a political pamphlet, or the paragraph of verbiage that does duty for a newspaper leading article. The philosophy of clothes, the significance of tools and language, the restlessness of the human mind, the reaching out for new worlds to conquer, provide volumes for reflection even to-day. And the rich humour of it all! I do not know how many read Carlyle to-day, but I do know that they who do not have missed acquaintance with one of the greatest of English humourists. They will not find in Carlyle the kind of humour that is monotonously served up by a *Beachcomber* and his kind, but it is a rich, ripe humour that man cannot well condemn without condemning himself. Have a dip into *Sartor*.

The Annual Moncure Conway Lecture will be delivered in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, on Wednesday, April 27. The subject of the address will be "Obscurantism." The lecture will be given by Lord Horder, and the chair will be taken by Lord Snell at 7 o'clock. There are reserved seats at 1s. each.

We are pleased to see the Glasgow *Forward* taking up the position for which we have always contended, namely, that real freedom of thought involves the granting of the right of others to agitate against it. It seems that a small group of Fascists had been granted the right of use of a hall in which to hold a meeting. The meeting was for the purpose of supporting that "gallant Christian gentleman," General Franco. There have been protests, and the "Magistrates' Committee" have revoked the permit. We are not quite certain how Scotch

law stands, but in a similar English case we would say that the magistrates have exceeded their powers. In any case, we agree with *Forward* that preventing an opponent being heard is a poor way of demonstrating one's belief in free speech. If free speech is to exist in fact, as well as in name, it must submit to the principle of free speech being criticized adversely; and not merely submit, but advocate the freedom to express opinions with which it is in direct antagonism. The Christian Church has always permitted freedom of expression—of its own views. Even in Germany everyone has the most perfect liberty to shout "Heil Hitler," and English Fascists would have no objection whatever to the people applauding that cheap pantomimic performer, Mosley.

We do not think that American newspapers are up to the level of all our newspapers, although the best may easily beat those mixtures of sport, empty gossip, chatter about film stars, portraits of members of the Royal Family leading about puppies, or performing strenuous tasks, to say nothing of snippets that pass muster for literary judgments, or sermonettes by popularity-hunting preachers. But the better class of American papers are more alive to the fact that the first task of a newspaper is to chronicle the news. For example, when Clarence Darrow died recently, there were numerous notices of his death in our papers. Darrow was a famous lawyer, who spent both time and money in defending those whom he believed to be innocent. In America a number of the papers did not hesitate to point out that Darrow was a "Freethinker" or a "Materialist." Our papers seemed to be conveniently ignorant of the facts.

An effort is being made to form a Branch of the N.S.S. in the Eastleigh, Hants, District, and Freethinkers willing to co-operate are asked to communicate with Mr. A. Thomas, 4 Ideal Homes, Fair Oak Road, Eastleigh, Hants.

There are some "miserably mean church-folk," about, writes the Rev. A. Beaghen (Vicar of St. Paul's, East Molesey) in the April issue of his parish magazine:—

The church will have to get a new outlook on money as a spiritual force before we can hope to win the world for the Master. We church-folk are miserably mean in our gifts to God. Most people value their religion at a rather small figure. The standard for most is a copper standard. In some it is a silver one, according to habit, but the gold standard is a rare one. If we all gave to God as readily as we put down one shilling for pictures, or football, clergy would never have to ask for money to carry on. I often feel ashamed of the meagre gifts that find their way into the plates in church.

The point, of course, is whether the copper valuation is not the just one.

"Lay Catholic" writes to the *Catholic Times*, that a few months ago a gathering of Roman Catholics at the Albert Hall promised to die for the faith. He asks whether they are going to live to see the "Godless" Congress in our midst? So far as we are concerned, we give the fullest permission to "Lay Catholic" and his kind to definitely and completely live up to their Albert Hall resolution.

I wish to propose for the readers' favourable consideration, a doctrine which may, I fear appear wildly paradoxical and subversive. The doctrine in question is this; that it is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no ground whatever for supposing it is true. I must, of course, admit if such an opinion became common it would completely transform our social life and our political system; since both are at present faultless, this must weigh against it. I am also aware (what is more serious) that it would tend to diminish the incomes of clairvoyants, book makers, bishops, and others who live on the irrational hope of those who have done nothing to deserve good fortune here or hereafter.

"Sceptical Essays," Bertrand Russell.

## The Myth of Pope Joan

THERE are few better examples of the way in which Catholics and Protestants have both lied wholesale than the famous "fable" of Pope Joan. This story of a female Pontiff is well known, and it is generally dismissed as a fable; But exactly why it should have been circulated at all has not yet—in my opinion—been satisfactorily explained.

Joan is supposed to have been an English girl, who went disguised as a man to Rome from Metz or Cologne with her lover. There she showed great aptitude for theology and learning generally, and so great eventually was her reputation, that she was elected Pope under the name of John VIII., and reigned from 853 to 855. She gave birth to a child during a religious procession, and the mob in its fury turned and killed her. A statue is said to have marked the spot where this unfortunate occurrence took place, and it was only destroyed many centuries afterwards.

Such is the bare outline of the story, and there are intimate details with which it is embellished in the many published accounts, too unsavoury to be recounted here. When the Protestants, after the Reformation, got hold of the story of Joan, they used it to the utmost to discredit the Papacy; and some of the crude wood engravings with which they illustrated the accounts did not suffer from restraint.

The first writer who mentions Joan is a contemporary, Anastasius, the librarian of Leo IV., and he was followed by quite a number of Roman Catholic writers, who do not seem in any way to have questioned the tale. But it is here that "authorities" step in and leave the ordinary layman in a sorry state of uncertainty. Gibbon, for example, declares that the passage in Anastasius is "a most palpable forgery," foisted in some of the MSS. and editions of his works. If this is true, we have here the usual Christian liar at work. J. M. Wheeler, who wrote an article on Pope Joan for Foote's old journal *Progress*, as far back as 1885, examined one of these old editions and concurs with Gibbon. Then there is the testimony of Marianus Scotus, who wrote in 1086, and as he was a strong partisan of the Papacy, "his place and education," says Wheeler, "make his testimony of value." Again, however, come later Catholic and Protestant historians who claim that this passage in favour of Joan is also a forgery. The excommunicated Roman Catholic, Dr. Dollinger—he refused to acquiesce to the doctrine of Papal Infallibility in 1870—made a careful examination of all the available evidence, and he claims that over and over again the passages about Joan in the early historical accounts of the Popes are pure forgeries. Or, to put the matter a little more bluntly, the writers were just liars, that is, of course, if the tale of Pope Joan had no foundation whatever.

It is, however, difficult to imagine why these historians should have invented the fable if it is a fable. What exactly was in their minds? One can hardly imagine that the Papacy's own historians would foist a lying history of a female Pope into their accounts unless there were a very strong motive for it. What could be the motive?

Baring-Gould who deals with the question in his entertaining work *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* tries to show that the fable of Pope Joan is connected with the coming of Antichrist, that terrifying figure of the enemy of Christianity which at one time was so devoutly believed in by almost all good Christians. It was quite natural for them to imagine that the Evil One would one day appear in all his horror to exterminate the religion of Christ, the religion to save all

mankind. In the hatred for "counter-revolutionaries," "anti-Nazis," and other opponents of dictator regimes we get, even in our own day, the feeling expressed by the early Christians for Antichrist. What this terrible personage was to look like when he came, or how he was to appear, seems to have puzzled the old Church writers considerably. He was, to be true man and true devil; or a devil in a phantom body; or merely a very wicked man "acting upon diabolic inspirations"; or a man whose body was taken possession of by the Devil to be trained for the office of Antichrist. Moreover he would do his utmost to divide the Church—one half would hold only to worldly power; the other half trying its best to be "the only true Guide."

These ideas formed the basis of many myths and legends worked upon by the more imaginative writers in the Church. And it need hardly be added that some of them claimed that Antichrist had come, or was actually here. Even the Muslims admitted that he would one day overrun the earth devastating the whole world except (of course) such holy cities as Mecca and Medina, which would be guarded by legions of angels.

Be all this as it may, it does not—in my opinion—explain the origin of the story. Perhaps a better reason can be found in the state of the Church with its scandalous Popes of the period. It is doubtful if at any time in Europe was the Church in a worse condition. As Emmanuel Rhoidis in his book on Pope Joan says:—

A greater number of the elections of Popes were the result of violence or even murders. It often occurred that contending factions nominated their own successor to the Papacy, each supported by a mob armed with staves and stones, and with these implements fought for the Holy Chair. The vanquished aspirant was usually mutilated and cast into the Tiber. . . . The priest Anastasius, although excommunicated in open council . . . planted himself at the head of a cohort of soldiers, attacked the Church of St. Peter, broke open the doors, burnt the Acts of the Council, hastened to St. John of Lateran, tore the tiara off the head of the venerable Benedict, broke the pastoral staff on the back of the unfortunate old man, and after having expelled him with an ignominious kick, ascended the apostolic throne. Such scandalous scenes were often repeated, and the greater number of Pontiffs or of pseudo-Pontiffs, according to the testimony of Baronius, "ascended the holy chair, by trampling over the dead bodies of their predecessors or opponents."

Rhoidis gives many and fuller details of these scandalous times, and concludes that it could not have been difficult "for a cunning woman who had concealed her sex in male attire to deceive ignorant, credulous, and debauched priests." But it does not altogether follow even then that any woman could easily deceive debauched priests as to her sex—unless they were in the plot themselves. It might be possible for a woman to disguise her sex in our own times, as privacy is an easy thing to obtain in our crowded cities; but what privacy could there have been for a Pope surrounded as he must have been by priests and Cardinals under circumstances of intimate conclave?

Baring-Gould thinks that the fable was invented to show "that the mystery of iniquity was somehow working in the Papal court," crystallizing all that was foul there, and making Joan "the personification of the great whore of Revelation"; and perhaps this is a good explanation. On the other hand Rhoidis, and a number of Protestants in particular, do not for a moment doubt the current account of Pope Joan. For Mosheim, who half believes it, Baring-Gould has the greatest contempt, and he accuses also the Pro-

testants of the sixteenth century as "being thoroughly unscrupulous in distorting history and suppressing facts, so long as they could make a point." Mosheim "is false again" and again, according to Baring-Gould; that is, he was a liar. The Catholics lied when they invented the story, or forged it into the editions of Anastasius and other Church historians; and the Protestants lied when they sponsored it at the Reformation with embellishments of their own. It is a pretty example of wholesale lying on both sides.

It was David Blondel who first thoroughly exposed the fable, and in this he was supported by Bayle in his great *Dictionary*. But, of course, there are a number of writers who, after a careful examination of all that can be gathered on the subject, are of opinion that the story is true.

Wheeler, in the article already referred to, insists, however, that the story "is a fable," and adds:—

Its falsity will scarcely be questioned by anyone who read the analysis of the evidence in Bianchi Giovini, P. G. Brunet, and Dr. Dollinger. The story as first found in unimpeached testimony, towards the middle of the thirteenth century, is not the story as we have it now. Neither names nor dates are given, and it has all the appearance of a traditional scandal without what a modern would consider evidence or authority. The evidence for it in later authors is weak where it should be strong, and strong only to show its weakness.

And the moral for Freethinkers? I cannot close better than with the final words of Wheeler:—

Those who remember that documents once ascribed to Moses are now referred to a period of from eight hundred to a thousand years after his time, and that the Jews have quite a different version of the time and history of the founder of Christianity from that given in the Gospels, may perhaps perceive that the fable of Pope Joan is not without its moral in regard to the historic evidences of established orthodoxy.

H. CUTNER.

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## Social Idealisms

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CERTAIN Idealist schools hold that one of the fundamental characteristics of Mind (with a capital M), is *discontent* ("divine," or other), or "the desire to mould its environment into harmony with it" (*Whence, Why, and Whither*, by Robert Arch, p. 85). If we translate this into concrete terms, we may say that some of the best minds in all ages have been discontented with their social environment; and may proceed to infer that, even before the dawn of history, men had visions of an improved social order. In view, however, of the futility of prophecy, and the rarity at all times of cogent thinking, it is at least equally safe to assume that these dreamers had no clearer perception than most of their descendants of the goal they sought, or the sort of stable social order they desired to establish.

But alas! Time continues his merciless flight, and most Utopias are already badly "dated"; warning us of the fate in store for any similar attempts, on our own private account, in the same field. Nevertheless, to-day is the hey-day of the social reformer and prophet. He delivers his message from every tap-room. Journalists, professors, politicians and playwrights jostle one another for platform-space to proclaim the New Age—what it ought to be, and what to do. Worse, however, remains behind! The Semitic triad of religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—with not a little assistance from Plato (who

should have known better) imported into the Western World the facile, fateful, and frightful doctrine of "exclusive salvation"; which, after doing incalculable damage in the religious field, insinuated itself into the political; so that to-day we have, in addition to a multitude of smaller ones, two great and powerful "gospels" (Fascism and Communism) contending, not without the tale of horrors historically associated with gospel-spreading, for supremacy in Europe.

Here, perhaps, the religious gospels are entitled to claim that they actually have the advantage of the secular; because, although Judaism—following Babylonian precedents—began by confining its aspirations for social betterment to *this* world, its offspring, Christianity, soon gave that us as a "bad job," placing its Utopia where it would "stay put"; viz., in an imaginary land where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

On the strength of this indictment of modern secular gospels, and in view both of the complexity of nature, including human relations, and our almost total ignorance of the direction in which evolution is leading us, we venture to express the hope that no good Rationalist will allow any "ism" (not even our well-beloved *Rationalism*) with which he is in sympathy, to take the name of status of a "gospel."

On the other hand, while we will have nothing to do with a "gospel," each and all of us is bound to have a *private Utopia*. Why? Because, although we know its instability—as something that is mainly resultant of our personal preferences rather than of the relevant objective facts and forces (of which we are relatively ignorant); nevertheless, we *must have a background* for our own schemes for reform; otherwise we shall find ourselves helping to set up a social order of which we do not approve.

We venture to suggest that before framing our Utopia, we ask ourselves a number of questions, somewhat on the lines of the following specimens:—

(1) What is the particular form of social order that I desire to see established—not as means to an end, but as an end in itself?

(2) As regards population, am I chiefly concerned with numbers or quality? If numbers tends to swamp quality, do I wish the former to be restrained?

(3) Do I favour "dangerous" living—i.e., the spirit of individualism, rivalry, and adventure in work and play? Or do I favour "secure" living and the arts of peace—i.e., labour, literature, science, learning, "art"? Do I favour neither, but wish to preserve both?

On the answers to some such questions as these we can construct our private Utopias; and thereafter restrict our support to such reforms as we deem to be helpful to the realization of our ideals.

If we plump for the ideal of "secure" living, we must remember that this can only be realized—if at all, owing to external interference—by *planning*, and that planning on the grand scale involves *much interference with personal liberty*. Dr. Greenly and others have called attention to a feature of Herbert Spencer's sociology, which he appears to have either overlooked or ignored. When he compared the evolution of society to that of the human body, and concluded that right conduct would ultimately become as automatic among individuals composing a society as among the individual cells of the body, he was apparently predicting—at the end of our process—something rather like a "slave-State."

However that may be, mere commonsense will assure us that, in great and complex organizations like our modern States, the price of social harmony will always have to be paid in the coin of personal freedom, or the liberty to "do as one likes."

Our private Utopias will no doubt differ as widely as our characters, preferences, and prejudices; but we may mention two types of Utopia, which we think will be poorly represented among us:—

(1) The Christian type. A world all smiles and goodwill, where brotherly love reigns supreme, and the antipathies that men are born with will die out in an atmosphere of perfect peace, happiness, and mutual affection.

(2) "Weary Willie's" type (cf. Gonzalo in *The Tempest*):—

... "riches, poverty.  
And use of service, none . . .  
No occupation; all men idle, all;  
... Nature should bring forth  
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance."

If Utopias, as has been remarked, soon become out of date, so also—but at a slower rate perhaps—do forms of government, which surely must in the end conform to their environments. The prudent private Utopist will therefore, we believe, usually decline to saddle the inhabitants of his Paradise with a form of government which may be very dusty by the time that his Paradise gets going. This is not, of course, to say that he is not entitled to support, as means to the desired end, any particular form of government he may fancy; but the very word "means" should knock the bottom out of the tanks of religious poison-gas in which certain notorious forms of government have been packed by unscrupulous aspirants to power.

Notwithstanding their necessary diversity, our private Utopias ought to have at least one common factor—viz., our love of liberty. We are *free* thinkers, and supporters of the maximum degree of freedom for individual speech and action, which is to be had under our particular political and social circumstances. If there be some among us who are prepared to sacrifice every vestige of such freedom, in return for the social advantages to be had under a Dictator; we venture to hope that others may feel a mild critical interest in the degree to which the claims of liberty have been met or cut by the inhabitants of our own private Utopia. The following are extracts from their laws or regulations:—

(A) *In Restraint of Liberty*

1. No person is permitted to survive his birth, unless the Community has undertaken to "father" him if needful—i.e., on the fortuitous failure of himself, his family, friends, etc., to do their normal offices.

2. No person is permitted, under the severest penalties, to attempt the overthrow, by *fraud or force*, of the existing Government.

3. No person is permitted, under severe penalties, to represent to the public as *facts*, either false or unverifiable assertions. In propaganda of any kind, *facts* must be clearly distinguished from unverifiable assertions, or theories.

4. In schools and colleges, the following injunction (adapted from Bertrand Russell's *Sceptical Essays* p. 11) must be read aloud daily: "You are not to believe any proposition, however attractive, when there is no ground whatever for supposing it true." In State-subsidized schools, the teaching of religion or politics, except as "History," is prohibited.

(B) *In Aid of Liberty*

1. Except as provided (in A.3 above), no restraint of any kind is to be imposed on the propagation of opinion—e.g., the advocacy or criticism of new religions, forms of social organization, government, etc.; neither is any "ban" to be put upon a man for his opinions, unless these can be shown to have a practical bearing on the kind of work he may have to do.

G. TODHUNTER.

## Satanic Soliloquy

### III.

#### RENDER UNTO CÆSAR

As a candidate for every Hell yet invented, I must insist: To *Heaven* with the Pope!

#### PROVERB

Give a Christian enough rope and he'll hang every-one who ventures to disagree with him.

#### QUESTION WITHOUT ANSWER

Why should *God* be God? Why not the beetle I stepped on yesterday, or the fish I shall have for dinner to-morrow, or that tetanus bacillus lying in the roadway?

#### PHILOSOPHY AT 2 A.M.

What if Christianity *is* true?  
Ah! but what if it isn't!

#### THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

The Christian spirit is, of course, the soul—that little bit of something that others haven't got.

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

If any Archbishop, Spiritualist, Fortune-teller, Astrologist, Witch-doctor, or other confidence trickster will demonstrate the efficacy of his magic by predicting the winner of the Grand National seven times seven times in succession, I'll unconditionally subscribe to his gaudy nonsense instanter.

#### MONOMANIA

What, after all, is monotheism but the malign product of a belated realization that too many divine cooks spoil the theological broth?

#### EXPLANATIONS PENDING

What will happen to the Lord's Day when a cessation of the axial rotation of the earth leaves one half of this ball bathed in eternal daylight, and the other wrapped in never-ending night?

#### EDENSONG

Let us not begrudge the Devil his due: in inducing the Edenic pair to sin the Sin, he was at least Original. Moreover, he thereby became the anti-godfather of all of us. But for his timely intervention, it must be plain, we should not exist. Even the rev. clergy, I take it, will perforce concede that according to the Bible the animated hordes of God's images which now infest this ball formed no part of the Divine Plan. Did the plan miscarry? Then we all owe our lives, for what little they are worth, not to a birth-controlling God who envisaged a stationary world population of two, and fully intended to leave it at that, but to a satanic hint regarding the highly illicit and secret process whereby two might become four, and four incestuously eight. . . . The embarrassing question of where we should all be, had not a far-seeing Lucifer advocated a diet of fruit, should make even a Christian Archbishop pause and think. Or at any rate pause.

#### THE CHRISTIAN CREDO

That an unborn babe, conceived out of wedlock, is damned even before it sees the light of day.

\* \* \*

That the Flood legend is not a legend.

\* \* \*

That the end of the world is nigh.

\* \* \*

That toothless Atheists, immediately they reach Hell, are thoughtfully supplied with a set of dent-

ures, that they may gnash therewith.

\* \* \*

That God's will *will* be done.

\* \* \*

That labourers of God are worthy of their hire.

\* \* \*

That inexplicable though His ways may appear, God knows what He is about.

P. E. CLEATOR.

## Franco and David

RECENTLY, in the Press, Sir Henry Page-Croft, M.P., referred to General Franco as a Christian gentleman.

It was only a few days previously that the British and French Governments had appealed to His Holiness, the Pope, to ask Franco if he would cease killing quite so many women and children in Spain.

What results they expected to get from Christ's vicar on earth, who never raised a single protest against the killing and maiming of wretched Abyssinians, and whose church, on the contrary, blessed the aeroplanes which dropped poison gas on defenceless natives, one cannot imagine!

But Franco's record pales into insignificance when contrasted with that of the biblical hero David, who was, as we are told, a man after God's own heart. The Bible tells us that in one day alone, he "put 47,000 people to death," on another occasion, "sawed off the limbs of the vanquished," on yet another, that "he brought out the people from the city and cut them with swords and with harrows of iron and with axes," and once again Franco's rival "Smote the land, leaving neither man nor woman alive."

This record must be a great inspiration to Franco!

In addition to this, David ran an enormous menage of wives and concubines; but although we are told that safety lies in numbers, this did not apply in his case, for he seduced the wife of Uriah, the Hittite and then deliberately worked things so that Uriah should be killed and he could keep the lady.

If David ever did exist, he was just a bloodthirsty sadistic monster—and yet, we are told—a man after God's own heart, and now, we hear that Franco is a Christian gentleman.

In the same papers that published this statement concerning Franco, was published a speech by Dean Inge, in which he made a violent attack on the Republic of Spain. He talks of the atrocities committed by the Republican Government, but takes good care not to mention Guernica or Barcelona, or to refer to the appalling massacre of the Asturian miners, which took place in 1934, long before the war started.

Dean Inge is a man who has far more brains than most members of "the cloth," and an undoubted flair for writing; but he is an absolute dyed-in-the-wool Tory, who can never say anything without violently attacking the "lower classes."

When one reflects that the leisure and good income is largely derived from the Church of England, who draw royalties from mines (which royalties ought to be in the pockets of the wretched miners who produce the wealth) and tithes from poor farmers who cannot afford to pay, one would think that common decency at least, would keep him quiet concerning this class of people whom he, in common with his kind, has exploited for centuries.

Spain has been the great test of our time. She has shown us that a large element of the governing classes of this country are altogether Fascist at heart.

Mr. Chapman Cohen once remarked that Fascism produced tyrants at the top, cowards at the bottom, and hypocrites in between: he might, I think, have added "snobs" to the last category.

The letters which appear almost daily in the *Times* from retired Naval and Military men, Captains of Industry (our so-called upper ten) and Tory M.P.'s, have shown that, in their inmost souls, these people admire

the Hitlers and Mussolinis of the world, and to such a length do they carry this admiration, that they are prepared to sacrifice the British Empire for their prejudices. The way they drag in Christianity again and again to bolster up their rotten so-called arguments would be amusing were it not so tragic.

They really ought to give the God business a rest; but it is such useful propaganda in fooling the masses.

Napoleon once remarked that God was on the side of the big battalions: were he here to-day, he could also have added "big business."

This set pose as Christians and patriots, and yet place class in front of country and dividends before humanity, and with their tongues in their cheeks, pay lip-service to Democracy.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

## Correspondence

### RUSSIA

#### TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—Mr. Lyons has intervened in the discussion about his book and the Soviets; and since he here makes direct charges, a direct answer is possible. To treat the matter fully one would need the whole space of several issues of the *Freethinker*. A brief reply can only run as follows:—

First, if the appeal is to be to personal testimony, I have several friends who have spent long periods in the Soviet Union, and whose intelligence reassures me far more than Mr. Lyons's, as shown in his writings, and they testify to the exact opposite of Mr. Lyons.

But in such a momentous matter as the triumphant achievement of Socialism in the Soviet Union, more than personal testimonies are required. The subjective approach may lead anywhere; and I for one don't trust it as proof on either side. What we need is as objective a statement as possible.

That objective statement we have in the monumental work *Soviet Communism, A New Civilisation*, by the Webbs. Let anyone who wishes to plumb the abysmal prejudice of Mr. Lyons, read the great work of the Webbs. Mr. Lyons appeals to his "long activity in the Labour and Radical movement." Such appeals mean little when we recall the countless traitors, from Ramsay Maedonald to Mussolini, who can make the same claim. Nevertheless, if anyone has the right to make it, it is the Webbs, who exercised the greatest influence of any theoreticians over the whole of the pre-war Labour movement, and whose capacity and integrity cannot be questioned. The fact that the whole bias of their own activities has been diametrically opposed to Marxism should give them a "detached" approach if anything could.

The great work by the Webbs, crowning long lives of devotion to social progress, caused a panic among the reactionaries of the Labour movement. That was why Citrine got out his attack *I Search for Truth in Russia*. So far from people of Mr. Lyons's stamp having any good will towards the Soviet Union, they are the very people who most hate and fear it. Of course it has a good effect to talk about the way one approached the Soviets hopefully as a Socialist and was disillusioned, etc. But the test of these people is their activity at home.

I know nothing of Mr. Lyons's activities; but, like everyone else who has done his bit both in working for years for unity of the progressive forces in England to resist war and the lowering of the standards of living, I know where the opposition to that unity comes from. It comes precisely from the people whose attitude to the Soviet Union is indistinguishable from Mr. Lyons's. These people have threatened to smash the Second International rather than have any contact with Socialist Russia. While collaborating at every point with the Tories and with big-business in practice, they proclaim publicly that they are too pure in their Socialism to collaborate with progressive Liberals. They protest against Fascism abroad, and collaborate with the forces making for Fascism at home.

Here lies the test. In one's attitude to the Soviet Union lies the test of one's relation to the forces of progress of our day. It will be found that all the people who are ready to unite in defence of our Liberties have a friendly attitude towards the Soviet Union, whether they are Liberals, Labourites, Socialists, or Communists. On the other hand, all the sectarians speak with the voice of Mr. Lyons. Naturally Mr. Lyons's book has been welcomed with open arms by the enemies of unity. It is by that fact that we must ultimately judge him.

I think I have made it clear in the *Freethinker* before that I do not believe there is no internal conflict of good and bad elements under Socialism (leading towards Communism) as in the U.S.S.R. As Stalin has repeatedly shown, the internal bad forces are those striving for bureaucracy, doctrinaire inhumanity, and abstract orthodoxy. To clarify this conflict would be a real service both to the understanding of the U.S.S.R. and to progress in general. A book like Mr. Lyons's, however, seeks to confuse the issues, and to undermine by a lip-service to abstract ideals the forces genuinely making for bureaucracy, doctrinaire inhumanity, and abstract orthodoxy and destructive than any of the open Fascist or obscurantist attacks.

JACK LINDSAY.

## Obituary

### GEORGE V. REID

It is with deep regret that I record the death of George V. Reid, a member of the Manchester Branch, on April 2, at the age of 26 years, after a brief illness.

We became acquainted some three or four years ago, and his passing breaks a link in friendship's chain.

He was an enthusiastic Freethinker, and whilst his duties prevented his attendance at our meetings as often as he would have desired, he was, as I well know, ever active in the "best of causes." A charming personality, a tolerant and courteous controversialist, he will be missed by a wider circle than that of his relatives and immediate friends.

At the request of his widow I conducted a Secular Service at the Manchester Crematorium on the 5th, and on behalf of the members of the Manchester Branch extend sympathy to his relatives.—W.C.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

### LONDON

#### INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Mr. W. B. Currey—"Punishment."

#### OUTDOOR

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place): Mr. F. P. Corrigan.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Highbury Corner) 8.0, Friday, Mr. L. Ebury. White Stone Pond, Hampstead, 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury. South Hill Park, Hampstead, 8.0, Monday, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Sunday, Miss E. Milliard, M.A., Mr. E. Bryant and Mr. G. Barnes. 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes and Tuson. Thursdays, 7.30, Mr. E. C. Saphin.

### COUNTRY

#### INDOOR

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Laycock's Forum, Albion Court, Kirkgate): 7.15, Annual Branch Meeting.

#### OUTDOOR

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place, Blackburn): 7.0, Mr. Jack Clayton—A Lecture. Literature for sale.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (The Mound): 7.0, Mr. F. Smithies—"Miracles Christ Didn't Work."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Stevenson Square): 7.0.—A Lecture.

CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE. Lord Horder will deliver the Twenty-ninth Lecture entitled "Obscurantism," at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1, on Wednesday, April 27. Chair to be taken by Lord Snell at 7 p.m. Admission free. Reserved Seats 1s. Tickets to be obtained from Conway Hall.

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