

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED by CHAPMAN COHEN •

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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Christmas and Christian Claims—The Editor</i>	- 817
<i>Freethought Flashbacks—Mimmermus</i>	- 818
<i>Unnatural Theology—George Bedborough</i>	- 820
<i>Peace at Christmas—J. Reeves</i>	- 821
<i>Some Old Freethought Journals—H. Cutner</i>	- 821
<i>Wayside Pulpit Finale—Fred Hobday</i>	- 822
<i>The Praise of Folly—G. W. Foote</i>	- 826
<i>Letters to a Christian Friend—R. H. S. Standfast</i>	- 828

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

Views and Opinions

Christmas and Christian Claims

THE ancient festival of the re-birth of the Sun God is once again with us. It was an event of almost terrifying significance to early mankind, conscious as they had become of the importance of the recurrence of the seasons, and yet dubious of their certainty. In the absence of certain considerations there is no reason why this ancient ceremony might not have continued as an interesting survival of a picturesque piece of primitive mythology; but there was the Christian Church. The attempt to convert folklore into concrete historical happenings made the whole story historically absurd and scientifically impossible. On this there is no reasonable ground for discussion. Only a fool or an interested theologian can seriously discuss whether a human child was ever born without a male parent, or whether a man once really dead was afterwards raised from the grave and again walked among the people. It is idle to say that the evidence is inconclusive; it is ridiculous. The story is not rejected because the evidence is insufficient, but because the fact is impossible. And to continue a system of theology which builds on the narrative as factual, while explaining that it must be taken in some vague allegorical sense is to add dishonesty to absurdity. But once give up the supernaturally sired, miracle-working, resurrected Jesus, what is there left on which to base the Christian theology? Nothing but a handful of ethical generalizations, known long before the New Testament character is said to have lived, and which experience shows has had but small beneficial influence on the moral and mental development of mankind. The one certain thing is that it was the supernatural figure upon which Christianity built, and must build so long as it can legitimately lay claim to even a modicum of honest dealing. But the relation between intellectual honesty and Christian belief has become so tenuous as to be almost imperceptible.

Some Christian Claims

Beginning with the most primitive of religious beliefs—the fact of *all* birth as a consequence of a liaison between a tribal spirit and a woman, Christianity continues its existence by a series of falsehoods and misrepresentations. By the time the date affixed to this issue of the *Freethinker* is past, some thousands of sermons will have been preached on the “Divine birth,” and very many thousands of preachers will be trumpeting the historic lie that Jesus came to *bring* peace and brotherhood to the world, or that he *did* bring peace on earth and good-will to all men. I fancy the stress on the last version will this year be somewhat less than it has been on previous occasions. It is true that Mr. Chamberlain has cheered us by assuring us that, thanks to Munich, we can all have a peaceful and merry Christmas; and those who can completely enjoy their *peaceful* close of the year, with its background of murdered and tortured men and women and children, and with nearly every nation in the world frantically arming at an unprecedented rate, with class-hatred preached to an unprecedented extent, and with a revival of primitive tribalism in a form far more brutal and bloodthirsty than is known among primitive people, may well satisfy themselves with a “Thank God *we* are all right.” Others may well wonder whether we have any ground for either thanks or a peaceful feeling, and whether even the worst of wars could be much worse than the present process of steady degradation of national life.

When and where did Christianity ever bring peace on earth and good-will to all men? At the most, on its ethical and religious side, it was never more than a brotherhood of believers, a form of combination that existed in the Pagan world in a far healthier form than it has ever existed under Christian auspices. In its pre-Christian form while it meant a brotherhood of believers only, it did not breed that rabid and sustained hatred of outsiders that has flourished wherever the Christian Church has been strongly established. The Church untamed and unaffected by humanism has offered the world peace, it is true, but it is the peace that Hitler offers to those who come under his control, a peace that every bully and every bigot has offered—“Do as I wish, or take the consequences.” Put aside the Christian nations of the world, and from whom, and by whom, is the peace of the world now threatened? By Germany! But Germany was until yesterday one of the most Christian nations in the world, and nations express at any moment the influences that have in the past acted upon them. Is it Italy? But Italy has been since the foundation of the Christian Church the seat of the most powerful body of Christians. Is it Japan that is a threat to the world? So far, that is true, although it is ridiculous to ignore that Japan has had as its teacher in the art of mass-murder the Christian nations of the world. These have taught the Japanese how to make war with all the help that modern

science can give; they have even lent Japan the money to buy these implements of slaughter, and then have taxed their own people to provide armaments for protection against the nations they have helped to make ready for war.

When and where has the Christian religion made for peace? Only once during the "Great War" did the old Pagan feeling of rejoicing at the re-birth of the Sun-god find expression. In the Christmas of 1915 the men on either side of the line left their trenches, met and fraternized on "No Man's Land." With what result? Immediate orders were sent from headquarters that such conduct was not to be tolerated. It might lead to lack of discipline. Soldiers on both sides, if they were to meet on friendly terms, even for a brief period, might fight with less ferocity. So a practical exhibition of a common humanity was not to be encouraged. They might sing "Peace on earth," and "Hark the Herald Angels," but it must be done with the finger on the trigger or a Mill's bomb in the hand. That was the universal language Christianity had helped to teach the world. And even today one may well ask where there is any real or deep-seated and wide-spread appreciation of the beastliness, the folly of war. Is it love of peace or fear of war that lies at the root of much that is said against war? I do not know that we can say that to any considerable extent there is a stronger feeling against war than there was. The two things that are harped on is, first the cost and next that the danger is now distributed over a wider area, and civilians are no longer free from the dangers that formerly faced soldiers only. Neither strikes one as a very flattering testimonial for Christian influence. After all war is war, whether the number killed be few or many, and whether human beings are destroyed by gun, poison-gas or bows and arrows. The cost of war, the slaughter of war, are mere matters of detail. War was always as deadly as it could be made by those who fought it. War always meant the slaughter of civilians, of children, of the aged and the sick. Blockade, and the cutting off of water and food from the civilians are as old as warfare. Christian influence has not made the results different, they have only made the waging of war more costly and more terrible, even more cowardly. But as it actually takes more courage, and far more intelligence to create peace than to make war, all that Christianity appears to have done is to give war an extra coating of cant and hypocrisy.

* * *

The Appeal to Facts

With characteristic dishonesty, or foolishness, the Christian preacher will at this season be asking his congregations to consider the vast changes for good that have taken place in life since Christianity has appeared upon the scene. It reminds one of Herbert Spencer's reply to a similar attempt to fix the decisive factor in civilization. He said that if one were to divide the world into those who wore trousers and those who did not, it would be found that the chief advance in civilization had been made by those who wore trousers, but it would hardly do to argue that civilization was a consequence of trouser wearing. To take the changes for the better that have transpired since the establishment of the Christian Church and place them all to its credit is a cheap, an easy, and a quite parsonic method of reading history. But it will not do. Christianity was not a religion that arose in a world where civilization was unknown. It took its rise at a time when the glory that was Greece had not quite disappeared, and before the greatness that was Rome had quite died out. It did not, like Mohammedanism, originate with a barbaric people, and afterwards show that it was not antagonistic to a civilization which supplied the source of European re-

covery from the Dark (Christian) Ages. The Empire in which Christianity established itself was the great Roman Empire, an Empire which gave to Europe its legal code, its tradition of settled orderly life governed by a common law, and an Empire in which the art and philosophy of Greece were treated with respect and even veneration.

Are we to imagine that if the Christian Church had never existed, that no advance would have been made from such a basis? Or ought we not to take the forces for good then in operation, and eliminating the Christian Church altogether, consider whether the distance between ourselves and the ancient Pagan world is so great that it requires a supernatural religion to account for it? Would there have been no advance due to human intercourse and human research? Or are we to adopt the trouser-wearing method of estimating the causes of human development?

What we can trace to Christian supernaturalism is the survival of witch-hunting and demonology, the naturalization of intolerance, the moralization of religious brutality, and the bitterest opposition to scientific progress, save where science could be harnessed to the work of slaughter. If the Christian Church was really, and intelligently desirous of utilizing Christmas to awaken the minds of men to the possibility of better things, it might do so by making the Christmas of 1938, not a period of rejoicing, but of shame and repentance. In a world that seems bent on committing suicide, where respect for human life and human dignity threatens to sink steadily lower we are asked to thank God for having sent his messenger—*nineteen centuries ago*—to establish Peace on Earth and Good-will to all Men. Only an hypocrisy sanctified by tradition and custom can enable the Christian preacher to preserve a straight face in the delivery of such a message.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Freethought Flashbacks

"Quick, my tablets, memory."—*Matthew Arnold.*

WITH the passing of the Hall of Science in Old Street, City Road, London, the Freethought Movement lost a social centre of importance. The well-known building was a rendezvous, and a hive of activity. A book might be written concerning it, for famous memories cluster about it. Mrs. Charles Watts, Edith Vance, and a group of their lady-friends. George Standring, whose contributions to the *Freethinker* were a joyous delight. His brother, Sam. Robert Porder, the indefatigable. Charles Watts, whose prowess as an actor showed what a loss the English stage had when he devoted his talents to Freethought. R. O. Smith, who took a paternal interest in the place, and scores of worthy folk who helped to build up its manifold interests.

It is amusing to recall how propaganda was mixed with amusement. At seaside and country excursions, planned at the old Hall, speakers would detach themselves from the main body and hold impromptu meetings, rejoining their comrades later. The literature sold, too, was considerable, and there was a constant supply of fresh material. At one period there were no less than five periodicals appealing to the "saints." Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*, Foote's *Freethinker*, Saladin's *Secular Review*, Charles A. Watts' *Literary Guide*, besides a regular supply of the *New York Truthseeker*, and *Boston Investigator*, and an Australian periodical. There were also two monthly magazines; Foote's *Progress*, Besant's *Our Corner*, and the N.S.S. *Almanac*, crammed with good read-

ing. Foote issued his *Bible Heroes* and *Bible Romances* in penny numbers, as well as a plentiful supply of topical pamphlets.

The first time I heard Annie Besant she lectured on *Giordano Bruno*. What an orator, and what a woman! Standing quietly by a table on the platform, she reconstructed a thrilling page of history, and, for an hour, made it live again. Her description of the burning of Bruno was unforgettable. Notable speakers were not rare in those far-off days, but some of the more widely-advertised were hardly to be considered as rivals to such masters of the art of speech as the Freethought Movement then possessed. But Annie Besant had a rare gift of golden speech, and her only superior in the art of tragic utterance was Sarah Bernhardt, that wonderful woman of that generation. So far as this country was concerned, Annie Besant was easily the first of women-orators. For fifteen stormy years she devoted all her strength to the furtherance of Freethought. The struggle was long and bitter, too long and too bitter for a woman, and the natural reaction after so many years incessant warfare doubtless influenced her decision for a quieter life. Indeed, the Freethought leaders have always had too much responsibility thrust upon them. Bradlaugh and Foote died from sheer overwork, although both men possessed magnificent physical strength. Constant lecturing, with its accompanying travelling; the production of a weekly paper; writing books necessitating unusual research; supervising a publishing department; and an endless succession of committee meetings and never-ending routine work associated with a national movement, is far too much work for any one man.

When a subscriber to the Freethought Movement once reminded Foote how much money he had given to the cause, the leader replied quietly, "I have given my life." It was the plain truth. I knew Foote for a quarter of a century, and saw him almost daily during the last two years of his life, when I acted as his private secretary, or amanuensis, as he called it. Men of outstanding ability, such as Bradlaugh and Foote, could have made fortunes had they but followed the beaten track, but they chose the better course.

At one time there were half a hundred men and women lecturing on behalf of the movement. They toured the country constantly, and penetrated to Ireland. Bradlaugh and Foote visited America, Charles Watts had a lengthy stay in Canada, and others even reached the Antipodes. What enthusiasm! At the height of the Bradlaugh struggle feeling ran high, and meetings were often disorderly. The audiences did not always realize how fortunate they were. Every Freethought lecturer was a person of talent; some possessed genius. And no movement possessed more oratorical skill than the Freethought Cause. Compared with the Freethinkers, the politicians lacked the fire of real enthusiasm, and solid conviction. Most political speeches are just so much verbiage and clap-trap. You feel that the speaker could put the case for the opposition with equal effrontery and equal ease. It is no more convincing than shadow-boxing.

In the course of the years some recollections stand out more vividly than the others. And some of these high-lights are worth recalling.

What a memorable evening was that meeting held in London to protest against the shooting of Ferrer. The Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, was crowded, and the platform was unusually representative. Indeed, it was a galaxy of talent. There were G. W. Foote, H. M. Hyndman, Dr. John Clifford, Cunninghame Graham, and others, gracing the platform, and a tense and expectant audience. The atmosphere was electric. Talk of oratory, there was more real eloquence

that evening than is expressed in a whole session of talk in both Houses of Parliament!

All the speakers excelled themselves, and spoke as they probably never spoke before. Hyndman, always a very forceful orator, was like a volcano in eruption. Cunninghame Graham, whose mother was Spanish, got so excited that, during his speech, he snapped his fingers, and broke into the maternal language. As for John Clifford, he forgot his theology, and spoke like the forthright Radical that he was, and always had been. It was hardly to be expected that Foote could outshine the other speakers in such company, but he did so. Never did he speak with such telling effect as when he arraigned the murderers of Ferrer before the Bar of Humanity. When he finished his peroration many of his audience were standing up in their excitement, and numbers were waving their hands.

The Foote-Warschauer debate was another high spot. I have been present at scores of such functions but never heard such a forceful speech as that in which Foote tore to shreds his adversary's case, and vindicated the Freethought position. It was magnificent, and it was war. Foote was then at the very height of his power. His opponent had quoted repeatedly from an author named McCosh. Foote made a very telling reply, and then asked who it was that disputed all this. I think, he added, with withering sarcasm, "a man named McCosh." The audience broke into spontaneous laughter, even the Christians admired the superb swordsmanship of the Freethought advocate. But the peroration was like the unloosening of an avalanche. It was a veritable triumph. Warschauer, however, lost his temper, and, rising from his seat on the platform, he made insulting reference to the Freethinkers in the audience. It was a most unexpected gesture, and, I believe, the only occasion such a thing occurred during a debate, although it was only too common in the open air.

If ever there was a man who deserved Voltaire's epithet of "Monsieur Multiform," it was John M. Robertson. His knowledge was truly encyclopædic. Other men might specialize, but he seemed to take all knowledge as his subject. He radiated learning, and even scholars learned from his researches. On the platform he was impressive without being solemn, but it was the stimulus of debate which brought out his best qualities. I heard him at his best at a hall at Peckham, South London, where he debated with a Spiritualist. The way he demolished his opponent's plea for human survival was uncanny. Bit by bit, argument by argument, he dissected the Spiritualist position, until there was nothing left. It was, as a neighbour whispered to me, "the death by a thousand cuts." The Spiritualist had the table loaded with volumes of reference, the places of reference carefully preserved by bookmarkers. Robertson had no notes at all; it was all registered in his head. It was a triumph of debating skill.

These snapshots may serve to recall some of the striking personalities associated with the Freethought Movement, men and women who gave their lives to the sacred cause of human emancipation.

English society may be profoundly corrupt, and the State may have miserably failed to play its part in the moral leadership of the world. But so long as there is, in our midst, a body of men and women who place principle before self, there is always hope for the future. For they are keeping alive the spirit of Liberty, and exercising those qualities which make a nation really great. The forces of good, though utterly out-numbered, were never so active, so zealous, so enterprising. The truest philosophers, after all, are those who in days of darkness and difficulty still believe in the good time coming, and work hard to ensue it.

"Let no man think that sudden in a minute
All is accomplished and the work is done;
Though with thine earliest dawn thou shouldst begin it,
Scarce were it ended in thy setting sun."

MIMNERMUS.

Unnatural Theology

DR. KARI BARTH was invited by the Gifford Trust to give the 1937-38 Gifford Lectures. He accepted the invitation and Barth's Gifford Lectures are accordingly published by Hodder's—another proof of the fidelity to principle which Religious bodies are noted for. The Gifford Lectures were instituted for the sole purpose of establishing and advocating a "Natural Theology."

Whether we blame Barth or not—after all everybody knows that Barth had no intention of preaching "Natural Theology" with which he totally disagrees—the Trustees must be criticized for allowing criticism of the "Natural" school only if such criticism comes from believers of one school only. Believers in Unnatural—or Artificial—or Revealed Religion are allowed to be invited to lecture, but never is allowed an opponent of ALL schools of Theism.

We imagine that the Trustees—like ourselves—see precious little difference between "Natural Theology" and any other sort of Theistic teaching. Paley's famous book on "Natural Theology" is merely the Parson's attempt to drag mankind back to Revelation by showing that the same teaching as the Bible gives follows naturally from such "natural" "reasoning" as the Design Argument.

It must be borne in mind that the Design Argument appealed to a pre-scientific age, a period which preceded Darwin, amongst a people ignorant in the main of what are now commonplaces of Astronomy, Geology and Anthropology. Paley believed in Miracles and therefore Paley's God could perform them. If anybody believes in Miracles he is not likely to boggle at anything the Churches teach. To-day all teachers who claim to mingle power to perform miracles with what they teach are only raising prejudice and contempt in the minds of all intelligent people.

Natural Theology must not be confused with Nature-Worship. It is difficult to imagine primitive man accepting and reciting a uniform creed. Certainly he had his Mythologies, but there was no particular objection to varying forms of revelation—mostly personal. Uniform creeds are a much later event. Paley and his forerunners and successors have never been in the least interested in Nature-worship.

Dr. Barth wasted no time, in his lectures, in controverting Nature-worship or Natural Theology. His object was to devote himself to preaching the "opposite" of all that is "natural." He preached instead the ordinary fundamental orthodoxy. To him, the Bible says it all; like the ancients who taught that if doctrines agree with their Bible these doctrines are unnecessary. If they disagree with the Bible they are false.

The "Church" figures largely in Barth's teaching. It is on this rock that Christian organization will finally shipwreck. Already we see constant attacks on Church bodies, just as if Christians could justify Christianity and Christian history by ignoring all that the Churches have done—never mind for the moment what they have said. The fact is that Christianity and the Christian Church stand or fall—we hope fall—together. Dr. Barth is quite right in defending the Church. It is difficult to see how he could do otherwise. A handful of Pacifists may separate themselves from the great (lying) Church, but they remain contaminated by the institution a few of them may

leave. If there were any Pacifists in the first earliest churches, they have left no trace in history. Pacifism was based on a few passages (contradicted by other passages) in Christ's alleged teaching, it has been neither practicable nor practised by any appreciable sections of the Christian groups—call them "churches" or what you will. Probably the most unhappy record of Christian unity in the World War was the fact that "hundreds of young men belonging to the Society of friends (Quakers) were true to the Guidance of Inward Light"—in other words "they joined the Fighting Forces of their Country."*

We are not here concerned with what is called "Naturalism," which is described in some textbooks as "a system of ethics, which excludes all supernatural sanction."

In Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, readers who look up "Natural Religion" are told to "see Deism"; and Lord Herbert of Cherbury (c. 1624) is said to have been "the parent of Deism." Anyhow, Lord Herbert taught that mankind has a sort of "religious instinct," a fallacious idea which has been resurrected recently to account for the semi-scepticism of some essentially religious writers.

Herbert taught that the bases of his particular form of Deism were "imprinted on the mind of man by the hand of God." His tenets consisted of "fundamental truths," of course. These included the existence of God, that it is our duty to worship Him, and that there will be rewards and punishments after death. He called these and other dogmas of his, "axioms neither requiring nor admitting proof."

As Materialists we believe that the "fundamentals," like Bibles and Church Creeds, are entirely human conceptions, and that all religions are equally "natural" in origin and equally "unnatural" as far as they are alleged to be "instinctive" or essential to the best interests of humanity.

On the other hand, Freethought certainly owes a very great debt to Deists like Voltaire and Paine and others—not because they were Deists, but because they courageously attacked the Christian myths and miraculous pretensions, in the name of Reason and Historical truth.

Dean Matthews, in a recent Sermon, published in the *Christian World Pulpit*, on "The Expectant Church," pays a very half-hearted tribute to the "Natural" World, the only world we know anything at all about—or as he calls it "this customary world of every day," which he says is not a mere shadow, as some Christians think. The Dean assures them that whether they realize it or not "THIS WORLD HAS ITS OWN LIFE." But this semi-praise, if praise it can be called, is given only as a contrast with the SPIRITUAL WORLD. The latter—he says, "is a source of creative life," and he throws a new light on the peregrinations of Deity, when he says of "The Spiritual Life" that "out of it God moves into this world of time and space."

Dr. Barth has confirmed what Ingersoll often said about "Natural Theology"—"the God of Nature," said Ingersoll, "is as cruel and atrocious as the God of the Bible." Dean Matthews can no more induce mankind to seek God in an unnatural Spiritual World than he can lead them back to the Old Scriptural or other Revealed Religion. "Natural Theology" is only "natural" to Ignorance. Miracles do not happen. And Revelation is either an individual misconception or a social fraud. As Paine remarked, "Revelation is necessarily limited to the first communication; after this it is only an account of something which that person SAYS was a revelation to him."

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

*This statement is fully documented on page 18 of *Arms and the Clergy*.

Peace at Christmas

GLANCING through an article on the above subject, by J. Middleton Murry, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, I caught sight of the word "Imagination" several times, printed with a capital letter within, as well as at the beginning of, sentences. This reminded me of something read a day or two before: A novelist was staying with a clergyman, a former college friend. Their views had diverged considerably on some points; and in the course of an argument the writer said to the other, "You should cultivate your imagination." This gave the parson pause, as he had a lively consciousness that of the pieces of advice he gave to others, one of the commonest was exactly that now given to him.

Reading on I found that the writer does not adopt the common meaning of the word "imagination," viz., the power or habit of constructing mental pictures (images) based on things that have occurred or might occur, or on notions of non-existent things, such as fairies, ghosts, witches, angels, demons, etc., but his attitude appears in the question, "What is imagination but a sense of the wonder of existence?" and in the statement that "imagination is the human existence itself." And we then encounter the amazing notion that "That sense of wonder has power ultimately to renew the world, if only men will suffer it."

Such phantasy easily becomes quasi—and then plain religious suggestion if not exactly propaganda. We are told confidently that everything is miraculous: "Everything we do or say is touched with miracle: one common miracle for the common man." And in the category he includes the realization of the fact, or notion, that "through the fidelity of one statesman to the instinct of the common man there was a miraculous birth of a new awareness of things."

Then, as a culmination of the religious suggestion, we note references to the "Grace of God," the "vision of the faculty divine," and the like, followed by the statement that to express the "authentic vision" in the institutions and laws of mankind is too prodigious a task for man and must be left to God—We are "to leave things, deliberately, to God . . . and spend some of our energies in making real to ourselves the nature of the God in whose hands we left them." Other gems of thought include "Bluffing God is a fool's game" (!)

So, the moral runs, if we can forget the horrors that are going on in Central Europe, Spain and elsewhere—and provided Hitler does not break out again, say by an ultimatum on Christmas Eve to Britain and France demanding the immediate return of the former German colonies—we may spend a peaceful Christmas, occupying ourselves on the one hand with pleasant reverie on our escape, for the time being, from the disaster of world war, and on the other hand with musing on the nature of God.

The writer, as is doubtless well known, is regarded as a great literary critic. And one wonders whether his absurd ideas exert any influence on literary students. Those who possess a tolerable quantum of world knowledge—of science, history, etc.—will doubtless regard the essay as in the main a farrago of nonsense. And to them it may recall the disastrous addition to, and the perpetuation by Christianity of the mass of ancient metaphysical-theological thought, accompanying and following the destruction of Greek-Roman science, literature and education.

J. REEVES.

Man is the measure of all things, both of that which exists and that which does not exist.—*Protagoras*.

Some Old Freethought Journals

The London Investigator

THE great Christian controversialist during Cooper's editorship of the *London Investigator* was the Rev. Brewin Grant. He had already met Holyoake in a famous debate, and he discovered that instead of being fair and courteous to opponents, a much better method of dealing with Freethought arguments was to be as scurrilous as possible. In this, Grant was a past-master, young as he was. I have often wondered whether the rather pathetic eagerness of the Freethinkers of his day to be as serious and as solemn as possible did not play into Grant's hands. In Joseph Barker, however, Grant found a kindred soul, and I fancy the two controversialists were not at all anxious to meet again after their one debate. Cooper characterized Grant as "destitute of any learning but vulgarity, any eloquence but scurrility, or any ability but braggadocio," and he added that "the intellectual, thinking, and conscientious of the Christian public tacitly repudiate his leadership." Cooper himself did his best to get Grant into a public debate on the Bible, but never succeeded. In the second volume of the journal an article is devoted to the Christian champion, which was far more than he was worth. However, the writer likened him and his arguments not a little to Hudibras who would

Undertake to prove by force
Of argument, a man's no horse;
He'd prove a buzzard is no fowl,
And that a lord may be an owl;
A calf an alderman, a goose a justice,
And rooks committee-men and trustees!

Old Samuel Butler knew mankind.

The *London Investigator* attracted, among other thinkers of the period, Robert Owen, then in his 83rd year. "My dear *Investigator*," he wrote, "I admire your continued straight-forward advocacy of the principles which you deem true, and of importance to your fellow man. We agree upon many and differ upon some points; but a difference of opinion between us, who know the formation of character, tends to cement our kind feelings for each other, and to connect our long-standing old friendship." Cooper indeed loved the grand old reformer; and when Owen proposed a Convention for May, 1855, announced in his journal that "our venerable friend is doing so with his characteristic hopefulness, enthusiasm, and persistency." Owen was, of course, one of the most remarkable men of his day, and I was glad to notice that a recent dramatized account of his life, by the B.B.C., did full justice to his greatness, and did not hide his unorthodoxy.

In April, 1855, a meeting in Newcastle was held in honour of the *London Investigator*, and its success in reaching a second volume. Cooper was not able to be present, but a striking autobiographical communication from him was read. It would indeed be worth reprinting now. He was proud of his Freethought, and of his father, who was a follower of Paine, Cartwright, Hunt, and Cobbett, and who arranged meetings in his own house to discuss the *Rights of Man*, the *Age of Reason*, the *Black Dwarf*, and Cobbett's *Register*. Robert Cooper heard Owen first as a boy of 14, and three years later, Richard Carlile; and he was even then lecturing and debating. At 18 he met in public debate, the Rev. Mr. Bromley. Cooper's *Holy Scriptures Analysed* procured his dismissal from the firm in which he had worked for many years—our pioneers had to pay for their Freethought. However, there commenced then his fine lecturing career which made him both well known and famous in the Socialist and Secularist world.

Apart from the very interesting topical items dealing with the Cause all over the country the *London Investigator* constantly published informative and scientific articles which can still be read with profit. In addition, characteristic biographical sketches of dead and living Freethinkers were given, as well as many translations from Voltaire. The famous *Dinner of Count de Boulanvilliers* appeared in its pages, a dialogue Voltaire rarely surpassed in satire and biting wit. I expect the translation was a reprint, but it is a very good one. Out of curiosity I compared it with the French original and found it excellent in every way.

Was Charles Mackay a Freethinker? I have an idea that he was at least very sceptical, as his *Popular Delusions* show. He was an inveterate versifier, and many of his poems and songs were sung all over the Empire during the nineteenth century—for example, the well known "Cheer Boys Cheer." At all events, several excellent specimens of his work appeared in the *London Investigator*. His "Truth and Error" gives a very good idea of his work as the following lines prove:—

Great is the power of Truth; but greater far
The power of Error. Sum their victories up,
Count o'er their conquests since the earth began
To keep a record of its own misdeeds,
And balance them with virtues, we shall see
Which of the two is mightier conqueror
And fills the greater volume—Easy task!
When every history tells the same sad tale,
And for every one page of happiness and right
Presents a thousand of despair and wrong.

The truth of this was never more apparent than at the present time.

The famous Hall of Science, City Road, was, after being closed for a while for redecorating, opened again in October, 1855, Cooper giving the opening lecture. What an interesting history it must have had, and what a pity it is that some permanent record of its activities has never been made. (At least I do not know if one has been written.) Cooper lectured in it many times, and also before the London Secular Society, the forerunner of our own National Secular Society.

Quite a number of well known names appeared for the first time in the pages of the journal—as, for instance, Charles Cattell—men who devoted themselves to the Cause with whole-heartedness and unselfish integrity. They were overshadowed by the leaders, it is true, but none the less their work was of the most valuable kind. Who remembers Henry Tyrell, or Miles McSweeney, and many other stalwart souls? Often as I look at their names in these old magazines, and read their excellent articles, or the reports of their fine lectures and meetings, I marvel at their industry and determination to spread the light in that religion-ridden old England of ours. They had little encouragement, and less money, but they held the flag of Freethought proudly high.

At Halifax, in January, 1856, a presentation was made to Robert Cooper, and it appears to have been a remarkable meeting. From the report the following will be of interest:—

Memorable will this remarkable gathering be in the annals of Secularism. It was not merely a personal meeting; it assumed a higher tone—a cause, and not a party was represented. We have seen many public assemblies in connexion with Socialism and Freethinking, but none of those who were present at the opening of the Carpenter's Hall, and Hall of Science, Manchester, in 1839 and 1840, will be enabled to form an adequate conception of the enthusiasm and unanimity that pervaded the vast audience. It was a demonstration in the most literal sense of

the word. The impression upon the public was as singular as it will be indellible. Halifax was taken by storm.

Even George Jacob Holyoake sent a letter to the meeting, in which he expressed his great admiration for the services rendered to Freethought by Robert Cooper; and that great Chartist, Ernest Jones, "in declining payment for advertising the meeting, said, 'I only wish it were in my power to do more for so noble a character as Mr. Cooper.'"

Cooper himself gave a fine speech in reply; he was always an excellent orator, and he excelled himself on this occasion. He made in addition a splendid tribute to Thomas Paine:—

The secret of Paine's influence, Deist only as he was, lay in this—he was a man of principle. What he believed to be true he had the courage to avow in its integrity, and what is more to the honour of the publicist, he had the consistency to maintain in its integrity. He cared not for gaining the convictions of those who were too "prudent" to express them when they received them. Paine esteemed Truth as a principle to be revered and followed, and not as a mere instrument to be wielded only as art or policy might dictate. Had he compromised truth, had he written this or that sentiment with the ambiguity and feebleness of a literary fencer, and not with the force and direction of a moral Hercules, would his *Common Sense* have saved America, or his *Age of Reason* shook Christendom? He and his books would have been forgotten, the States would have remained a sop for the English aristocracy, and our Free Discussion Halls would have been nurseries for credulity and ignorance.

There was a great deal more in this remarkable speech, and one can well understand the tremendous enthusiasm it aroused. Alas, Robert Cooper was to edit his paper for but a year longer.

H. CUTNER.

(To be continued)

Wayside Pulpit Finale

ALAS! my journeyings to and fro along a certain thoroughfare are no longer enlivened by the "Wayside Pulpit" which has entertained me for so many years.

The chapel looks strangely deserted, and no one seems to know what is going to happen, but here are a few gems culled from past weeks, which may be of interest to Freethinkers if only to show the poverty of thought in the slogans put up by professional Christians for the delectation of their dupes; they cannot be intended for people who are intellectually emancipated.

Number one shows a rather feeble attempt at modernization:—

The Bible is the great highway code of life.

When one looks round at the state of affairs in most countries where Christianity holds sway, one is inclined to agree. I know that Christian apologists say we are so to speak, only "Learners," and have not "passed our test" as yet, but nevertheless it is a fact that when we read of heathens bombing defenceless men, women and children in China, a howl of indignation goes up from the very people who are clamouring for this country, this Christian country mark you, to build more and more bombing-planes for use against their fellow Christians in other lands. When that "Christian Gentleman," General Franco, orders the bombing of Spanish women and children, he receives the blessing of Christ's chief representative on earth, the Pope.

God gives his best when we have given ours.

This may be said by some to apply to conduct, but it can also be interpreted to apply to cash, and in this connexion it is certainly a very cute Christian way of swelling the Sunday collections, and incidentally the income

of the Parson. Or the slogan may be used to bolster up an appeal for "money to build new churches" despite the oft lamented fact that most of the existing churches are already only half filled.

All the darkness of the world cannot overcome the light of one small candle.

Rather an unfortunate simile, for it only requires the puff of a mere breeze to put out the candle; if the candle stands for the light of Christian knowledge, it only needs a breath of intelligent criticism to extinguish it.

The light of one star illumines a thousand mountains.

I should have more respect for my eyesight than to attempt to read by the light of a myriad stars, and if the light of one star is the best example of illumination these Christian leaders can think of, I suggest it is time they gave up and put their wayside pulpit schemes into the hands of an advertising expert.

Finally we have what is, perhaps, the pick of the bunch:—

Prayer need not be long if faith be strong.

Surely this is an encouragement to the lazy ones among the faithful to curtail their devotions, and may even make fashionable the grace before meat, said to be in vogue at some of the American quick-lunch counters. When one's meal is served, one looks upwards, gives a shrill whistle, and then pointing to the food on the plate shouts "Blessing!" And I can easily imagine some whose faith is particularly strong, even adding "And make it snappy."

Since writing the foregoing, I learn on good authority that the place has been purchased by the local Co-operative Society to be used as a centre for its educational and recreational activities; which calls to mind a suggestion of mine, written for the *Freethinker* more years ago than I care to think of, that our churches and chapels should be made into places where people could gather for recreation and amusement seven days a week instead of, as at present, being dedicated to the worship of a god whose existence is, to say the least, highly problematical, on Sundays, and shut for the rest of the week.

Therefore I gladly forgo the occasional amusement which the wayside pulpit afforded, fully consoled by the thought that a place which has hitherto been devoted to the preservation of a superstition and the enslavement of people's minds, is to be turned into a centre of social usefulness and enlightenment.

FRED HOBDAV.

Acid Drops

The United States Minister of the Interior (answering to our Home Secretary), strongly denounces the robbery and torture of defenceless people in Germany by the Nazi Government. But Mr. Ickes is hardly just to primitive mankind when he compares Hitler, Goering and Co. with the human beings of a period when "man was unlettered, benighted and bestial." Even that stage of human existence shows nothing at all comparable to the calculated brutality of the German Nazi regime, which is far worse than the British public in general is allowed to know—probably for fear of interference with Mr. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. For example, little or nothing has been said of the number of children, without parents or guardians who are wandering in the no-man's land between Poland and Germany, living as best they can on anything they may find.

Mr. Ickes also rebukes men like Colonel Lindberg and Henry Ford for accepting decorations from, and professing friendship for the German dehumanized leaders. Fancy a man with any genuine self-respect and civilized feelings walking into a room and cordially shaking hands with men such as Goering, Hitler, Goebbels, Streicher and the like, and professing friendship for them! One ought to feel like turning to the strongest disinfectant known to man for a cleansing of one's flesh after such an experience.

There is in this country a Potato Control Board (we think that is the name of it.) At any rate it controls the agriculturalist's sale of the potatoes he grows. But the potatoes sold must be within a certain size. If they are too small or too large they may not be sold, and some growers have recently been fined for selling potatoes that were above or below the size allowed by the Government. But potatoes unimpressed by Munich, or anything else, will not grow to order. They insist on being big or little instead of being the size ordered by our potato dictator.

Now it strikes us that here is a chance for prayer and providence to do something useful. The clergy should have a week's prayer that potatoes shall grow only of a certain size. That would do no one any harm. It is not like praying for victory in battle, when the other fellow has to be killed by way of answer. A potato prayer would benefit all and injure no one. And consider the religious value of potatoes all—from the date of praying—growing the legally correct size. We have prayers for rain and fine weather, for good harvests, and rich crops, why not prayers for four-inch potatoes—or whatever the legal size is? We offer the suggestion to the next Methodist Conference.

Dr. Frank Buchman, self-appointed leader of the so-called Oxford Group, is allowed to advertise his Society in his Broadcast Talk recorded in the current *Listener*. He quotes a silly testimonial from a Peer of the Realm—much as several patent-medicine quacks do for the merits of their nostrums. We should like the B.B.C. to define the limits of permissible advertisement in broadcast talks. In the "talk" referred to, Dr. Buchman goes one (or two) better than Jesus Christ's advice to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." Buchman says, "We must be reborn every day." "Changed lives" indeed!

We frequently give space to sentiments and sermons which indicate a woeful lack of sense on the part of the clergy, from whom we quote. This week we are happy to publish some words uttered by the Rev. C. D. Eades, at Glasgow Methodist Society's anniversary meetings at Paisley, because we think Mr. Eades speaks the truth—on this occasion. He said: "The final argument for Faith is not rational or intellectual." We merely note without opposition, his deduction from this statement—namely that in such circumstances "Man must have an imperative." Obviously if man loses his reason and his intelligence, he will have to be governed by those who do not consult men's reason or intelligence.

Father Woodlock says that the Gospel miracles are not incredible. Well, it depends upon how much one can swallow. Most people would find the feeding of the five thousand, with more food left at the end of the feast than was there when the feast began, pretty tall. But what is the use of religious faith if it can believe only such things as are likely to happen? And if Father Woodlock believes that after he has prayed over some wine and some bread they become flesh and blood, nothing ought to trouble him. But perhaps Father Woodlock only says he believes these things.

In an article in the *Evening Standard*, the Rt. Hon. Duff Cooper writes upon the state of affairs in France. He makes a comparison between the French "Anti-clerical," who "believes the Church is wrong, and therefore wishes to destroy it," and those in England "who are indifferent in religious matters, who never visit a Church save for a wedding or a funeral, but who would unhesitatingly write themselves down Church of England whenever called upon to do so." Mr. Cooper makes the comparison and rules in favour of the Frenchman. He continues:—

Now, although it may be a hard saying, the man who hates the Church and wishes to destroy it is a more religious man than the man who cares for none of these things. The fact that there has never been an anti-clerical party in England does not prove that we are a deeply religious people, but the reverse.

What Mr. Cooper is trying to say is that the man who is actuated by deep conviction is a more valuable type to the community than the man who holds to nothing firmly and is apt to be driven thither and thither by any wave of popular emotion. So far so good. But the identification of deep principle with "religion" is another matter. It has no rational justification, and, although it is, indeed, truly "religious" to make the attempt, there can be no reason save a political one to play the game of organized religion by mixing up words in this unscientific way. The dishonest and deliberate confusion of terms should be left to the Churches.

The Bishop of Liverpool differs (in the *Times*) from the Bishop of St. Albans in thinking that teachers of religion in the Schools "should be required to give evidence of sincere belief." He sees the absurdity of any such attempt and the danger of raising a new brand of hypocrisy amongst teachers. In defending himself, the Bishop of St. Albans says it would be sufficient test for sincerity of belief that "the candidate in question is a practising and active member of the Christian Fellowship."

Is this indeed a proof of sincerity? Does not the Bishop mean that anyone drawn from the membership-rolls can at least be relied upon to play the game, and say the things required of him or her? The Bishop, in fact, has evidently still faith in the time-honoured methods of exacting loyalty from those within the Church itself. It is but another instance of the strength of the "Old School Tie" tradition. The "cads" he thinks, can be relied upon to "play the game."

And what a game it is! The perpetuation of a criminal outrage upon the unsuspecting minds of children. Plugging them with blessed mysteries and hiding from them the fact that scholarship and scientific teaching are not with the Churches but against them. Creating in the helpless a disposition (which may last a life-time) to resist any facts that appear inimical to Holy Teaching. Secular Education, which confines itself to importing knowledge on which practical agreement has been reached by all, does, at any rate, recognize the rights of youngsters to be protected against such dishonesty. In this the friends of Secular Education recognize a deep principle, though not a religious one.

The irresponsibility of "responsible authority" has become a byword. A case in point was the appointment of Sir John Reith to control the B.B.C., for which he was not fitted. Then followed Sir John's appointment to Imperial Airways, and now he has to confess (according to the *Evening Standard* diarist) "I know so far comparatively little about civil aviation. I used to be an engineer of sorts . . . but I don't think it will matter if I don't learn any more about the technical side. . . ." Rumours are circulating that Sir John will shortly be out of his job. Perhaps some appropriate qualifications are necessary to an Air Service, which was not the case with the B.B.C. However, much may be forgiven a man who has the courage to confess to his shortcomings—a thing rarely, if ever, met with in Government circles.

Pertinent to the above is a story from a contributor to the *New Statesman and Nation*, concerning the Cotswold Village of Withington, near the Roman Villa of Chedworth. The contributor found that many of the fields around had gone out of cultivation, and learnt that there was hardly a farmer in the village. All the big houses were taken by Londoners, who let farming go to pieces. Enquiring who lived in the Manor House, he was told: "Oh, that is Mr. Morrison, the Minister of Agriculture!" And this is the man "responsible" for the futile Milk Bill. Then there's Sir Thomas Inskip, one of those "responsible" for the country's defence, recently declared too weak to defend us, in spite of yet uncalculated millions of pounds already allocated for "defence." The way of Cabinet-making by shuffling and reshuffling the same old pack of incompetents is leading us into

greater danger as time goes on, and some of those responsible for gross abuse or neglect of duty and the people's confidence, should be arraigned at the bar of the House—as aforetime would surely have been done.

To a group of church "dignitaries," the Pope extolled the benefit of the "spiritual exercises," which he had been taking during his week of "retreat" preceding Christmas. What an opportunity for the Vatican to issue a chart of instructions! May we suggest the course to be outlined?—*Exercise 1.*—Turn face to altar, crucifix, candle, or saint; with right hand tap the left breast; then cross the hand over to tap the right breast. Repeat the motions downward from forehead to breast. *Exercise 2.*—On the knees bend. Bring the arms forward with elbows slightly bent and place the open palms together. Recite the trainers' formula. *Exercise 3.*—Rise as far as possible to the normal erect position of a man, and repeat *Exercise 1*, but facing a direction most convenient. And so on. (N.B.—Should this course not suit, join a squad of all-in wrestlers for souls.)

"To Love and to Cherish" is a new play by Mr. Michael Egan, author of a successful play entitled "The Dominant Sex." The new play deals with the conflict between Christian ideas of marriage as opposed to divorce. The principle characters are a vicar and his three daughters, one of whom has to strive with her "faith" against the divorced man she loves and her father's attitude thereon. The author has told a critic that "religion is going scientific, and science is becoming more spiritual." If this is the basis of his theme, the play must surely be what the author never intended—that is, a FARCE. By what other medium could "scientific religion" and "spiritual science" be presented?

As all sacred historians know, the house in which the Virgin Mary was born was conveyed, in the thirteenth century, from Palestine to Italy. No building contractors were employed, nor were there any freight charges incurred. A postage stamp to commemorate this interesting event has just been transported through the air by depicts the house being transported through the air by six angels. Why six angels? The Magic Carpet idea, as popularized by the *Arabian Nights*, was more economical of divine effort, and more impressive. These postage stamps may, in days to come, have much more than the usual philatelic interest.

Fifty Years Ago

THE Redeemer has come, but not the redemption. Christianity, like many other creeds, has simply diverted men from the plain paths of duty and happiness. It has promised them felicity in another life as a compensation for their wretchedness in this life. It has robbed them of the substance and cheated them with the shadow. The result is the terrible evils which all reformers deplore. Yes, there is something besides pleasure in the world for everyone who feels for his kind. While our Christmas festivities are in full swing he is conscious of that dark background to the glowing picture. And when the merry-making is over he will brace himself manfully to the task of slaying the monsters of ignorance and superstition which infest the world.

The Freethinker, December 23, 1888.

Czecho Freethinkers' Relief Fund

Previously acknowledged, £186 15s. 4d.; W. Angus, 8s.; W.R.B., 5s.; Miss D. G. Davies, 5s.; C. E. Turner, 10s. 6d. Total £188 3s. 10d.

We shall be obliged, if there is any inaccuracy in the above list, or if any subscription is not acknowledged; if those concerned will write at once.

THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

To Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—A. Harvey, 2s. 6d.

H. BERLIS AND J. HAYES.—Many thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.

FRED HOLDEN.—We are obliged for cuttings and keen interest.

A. W. DAVIS AND C. A. BONNER.—Will appear next week. Too late for present issue.

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

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

Sugar Plums

We have received the following from Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, Secretary of the London Committee for the Conference of the World Union of Freethinkers:—

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In a letter to me to hand this morning (December 19) Captain Voska says, "We have more and more people on our hands daily and it seems to me there is very little hope of getting some of them to England, as your Government is not granting new quotas for evacuation."

And again later, "More and more members of the Volna Myslenko (the Czech Freethought organization) are applying to us for aid. Every one of them had some means, but these have been exhausted, and more and more turn to us for assistance. I really do not know what I will do with those people who cannot stay in Czechoslovakia; no other country wants them. There are unfortunately so many of them."

Germany has drawn its new frontier so that the thriving industrial town of Morava Ostrava is separated from its principal suburbs. McCurda Pipovsky, President of the Moravian Freethought Society, went to visit his mother's tomb, which is now in German territory. He was arrested by the Nazis, and has been condemned to four years of prison.

If this is appeasement, how proud we must be to be Englishmen.

C.B.B.

Mr. Beverley Nichols has been unwell, but is now better. During his illness he was in pain, then he thought how much luckier he was than an Atheist would be, and that leads him to address a "few words to the Atheist," who, poor devil, has not the comfort of a belief in God. We are not going to deal with these remarks now, save to say that they prove Mr. Nichols to be quite in the dark as to what Atheism is, and the scientific answers to what he does or what he might say. We hope that Mr. Nichols will not think what we have said is "abusive," a charge he brought against us a week or two ago in the *Sunday Chronicle*, because we make these statements deliberately, and offer to prove them.

We are not a professional journalist, and have never yet bothered to ask any newspaper to accept an article from us, and intend never doing so. Whenever we have ap-

peared in print it has been "by request." Now if Mr. Beverley Nichols wishes to learn what Atheism really is he may learn as much from one who has a greater right to speak as representing the professed Atheists of this country than anyone else, let him induce the editor of the *Sunday Chronicle* to request one, two, or three articles from us, and we will supply them, *without any payment whatever*. Mr. Nichols can then reply in the *Chronicle*, and I think I can promise both he and the editor that the discussion will create more interest in the paper than anything that has been printed for years.

If this cannot be done, if the editor has not the courage to face the criticism that is certain to be passed on him by the clergy, and by the more bigoted of his religious readers, then the columns of the *Freethinker* are open to him to the same end. If Mr. Nichols cannot carry out the first suggestion, and lacks the courage to carry out the second, then it is about time he ceased to (a) criticize something he does not understand, (b) believe something he evidently does not comprehend, and (c) cease to talk about his love of justice, and his freedom from bigotry. I am quite sure that a great many of the readers of the *Sunday Chronicle*, who are also readers of the *Freethinker* will see the justice of these proposals, and would be very pleased to see one of them materialize.

What is happening to the World? Following the opinion of Mr. Beverley Nichols, that the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be invited by the B.B.C. to take part in a discussion of religion, the North Western Area Council for Group Listening, Miss Halsall (Wigan) said that what was wanted was "More and better controversial talk such as a discussion between an Anarchist and a Capitalist, or between the Archbishop of Canterbury and an Atheist." The Senior Education officer of the Central Council for Group Listening said the Conference might take it that all suggestions would be seriously considered. And there it will end. One may rest assured that no discussion will take place over the air between a genuinely representative Atheist and a Theist. If the appeal for fair play gets strong enough to demand attention, some dummy or "safe" unbeliever will be put up. But can one imagine such a proposal as a real discussion between an Atheist and a Theist coming before the religious committee that look after these things? One remembers what happened in relation to the Bradlaugh Centenary when, after pressure had been applied, a short talk about Bradlaugh was arranged that might have been delivered by a liberal parson, and the real nature of Bradlaugh's fight with established religion obscured.

Elsewhere in these pages we print an article by Mr. Bedborough, on the Gifford Lectures, by Karl Barth. Readers may remember that in the early part of this year we wrote an article dealing with the gross abuse of the Gifford Trust by those responsible for its administration. It was not technically a legal misdemeanour, neither could it be called a religious one, for in that region dishonest handling of affairs in the interests of religion has so long been the rule, that few Freethinkers appear to believe that dishonesty in the interests of religious faith is at all deplorable. All the more do we appreciate a recent article by "Artifex" (said to be the pen-name of a very well known clergyman), on the same topic as our own article. The article appears in the *Manchester Guardian* for December 6.

The Gifford Trust was formed for the discussion of the belief in God, exactly as one discusses any question of natural science. No one was to be excluded on account of any particular religious belief, no one was even to be asked to make any profession of faith whatever, even Agnostics, Atheists and Freethinkers were to be invited. The belief in God was to be discussed from the point of view of Naturalism. Miraculous revelations had no part in the programme, probably because Lord Gifford—himself a famous Judge—realized quite clearly that a "revelation," if admitted, put an end to all discussion, and secondly, if not admitted as a revelation left the lecturer with the task of discussing how so curious a delusion arose, just as an historian of astronomy would show how particular wrong beliefs arose.

Now the fact remains, that during the whole period of the existence of the Gifford Trust no avowed disbeliever in God has ever been asked to take a part in these lectures. With gross, intentional, and deliberate dishonesty the Trustees have betrayed the trust placed in them, they have used the money of the Trust to prevent the very thing that the Trust was framed to secure. This was not because the Trust was not carefully drawn, it was because any Trust may be betrayed by those who administer it, and where religion is concerned the betrayal is almost certain to occur. The administration of Trusts depends upon persons, and where the right persons are not selected the wrong thing is almost certain to happen.

To do Dr. Barth justice it must be said that when first approached he declined to give these lectures, on the ground that as he was a believer in revealed religion, and a strong opponent of natural religion, he did not see how he could accept the invitation to accept payment for doing what the Trust took for granted—namely the treatment of religion as a natural growth to be dealt with in terms of natural science. Then he was asked again, and the moral waywardness of religion found expression. He accepted the invitation because he realized that by attacking natural theology he would be carrying out the wishes of Lord Gifford, because it would be to the good of natural religion to measure it against revealed theology. "Artifex" says of this exhibition of tortuous religious morality:—

I wonder what Lord Gifford himself would have said to such an argument? I confess I should not have cared to offer such a submission to the learned judge. He would, I am sure, have had little difficulty in brushing it aside. If a man leaves an endowment for the defence of some belief dear to him, do I really fulfil his desire by vehemently maintaining the exact opposite, so as to give those who may happen to agree with fresh opportunity to strengthen their muscles by disputing my statements? The position seems to me more ingenious than honest.

This is good, the analogy is not quite accurate. Lord Gifford did not leave his money for a defence of his own religious beliefs whatever they were. The endowment was left for a careful and authoritative study of the belief in God from the standpoint of natural science. The dishonesty of the Trustees and the casuistry of Professor Barth is even more culpable than "Artifex" assumes. And Dr. Barth is eulogized in the religious press as a type of very sincere Christian. After what has been said most of our readers will be inclined to agree with the description.

Touched

"He read of tens of thousands dead
Upon the field of battle spread
In motley squalor grey and red.
"My God, it's terrible," said he,
"My love, another cup of tea."

"They read of towns torn up like rags
Guns belching death from riven crags
Young girls who looked like haunted hags.
Said she, 'I'm furious at the way
That woman did my hair to-day.'"

And still the tragic tale to tell—
A war-swept world and raging hell
Of poison gas and bursting shell.
Said she, reclining in her car,
"How sad, the King has got catarrh."

For such as still remain quite sane
The moral of all this is plain—
Thank God—and Mr. Chamberlain!
So now indeed, faint not nor fear,
Here's Christmas and the Glad New Year!

A. HANSON.

The Praise of Folly

WHAT is the greatest novel in the English language? This is a hard question, which we shall not attempt to answer. We leave every one of our readers to enjoy his own selection. But the question has been answered, in his own way, by a leading novelist. Mr. Walter Besant declared that the greatest novel in the English language was Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*. That it is a great book no one fit to judge will deny, or hesitate to affirm. It is full of adventure and hairbreadth escapes; it exhibits a large variety of life and character; its wit, insight, and pathos show the mind and hand of a master; and a certain vivid actuality is derived from the fact that its pictures and portraits are to a large extent historical. Gerard and Margaret, the hero and heroine of the story, are the father and mother of the great Erasmus; respecting whom Charles Reade closes his book with a noble and pregnant piece of writing:—

First scholar and divine of his epoch, he was also the heaven-born dramatist of his century. Some of the best scenes in this new book are from the mediaeval pen, and illumine the pages whence they come; for the words of a genius, so high as his, are not born to die; their immediate work upon mankind fulfilled, they may seem to lie torpid; but, at each fresh shower of intelligence Time pours upon their students, they prove their immortal race; they revive, they spring from the dust of great libraries; they bud, they flower, they fruit, they seed, from generation to generation, and from age to age."

Erasmus was born at Rotterdam, probably on October 28, 1467. He was a "love child." His father, Gerard of Tergou, being engaged to Margaret, daughter of a physician of Sevenbergen, anticipated the nuptial rites. Gerard's relations drove him from his country by ill-usage; when he went to Rome, to earn a living by copying ancient authors, they falsely sent him word that his Margaret had died; upon which he took holy orders, and became a sworn son of the Church. Finding his Margaret alive on his return, he, of course, lived apart from her, and she did not marry another. They had a common interest in their boy, whose education they superintended. Margaret died of the Plague, when Erasmus was thirteen; and Gerard, inconsolable for her loss, soon followed her to the grave. Their boy was left to the guardianship of relatives, who cheated him of his little patrimony, and compelled him to adopt a religious life. Erasmus was thus a priest, though a very uncommon one. How curious that so many great wits and humorists should have worn the clerical garb! To mention only four, there were Rabelais, Erasmus, Swift and Sterne; each of whom has added to the world's gaiety, and also helped to free it from superstition. Christians who prate about the "ridicule" of holy things in which Freethinkers indulge, should be reminded that these four priests of the Christian religion could easily, between them, carry off the palm for profanity; while for downright plain speech, not always avoiding the nastiest of subjects, there is hardly a professed sceptic who could hold a candle to them.

Erasmus divorced himself from religious duties as early as possible. He detested the monks, regarding them for the most part as illiterate, bigoted, persecuting and parasitical vermin. His life was devoted to literature, and in the course of his travels he contracted a friendship with the most eminent and able men of the age, including our own Sir Thomas More, the author of the famous *Utopia*. Erasmus died on July 12, 1536. The money he had accumulated by

the exercise of his pen, after deducting some handsome legacies to personal friends, he left to relieve the sick and poor, to marry young women, and to assist young men of good character. This was in keeping with his professed principles. He always regarded charity as the chief part of useful religion, and thought that men should help each other like brothers, instead of fighting like wild beasts over theology.

Erasmus was a contemporary of Luther, and there is an excellent Essay by Mr. Froude on both these great men. He gives the palm to Luther on account of his courage, and thinks that Erasmus should have joined the Reformation party. But the truth is that Erasmus had far more *intellect* than Luther; he knew too much to be a fanatic; and while he lashed the vices and follies of the Catholic Church, he never left her fold, partly because he perceived that Luther and the Reformers were as much the slaves of exclusive dogmas as the very Schoolmen themselves. Erasmus believed in freedom of thought, but Luther never did. To sum up the difference between them in a sentence: Luther was a Theologian, and Erasmus a Humanist. "He was brilliantly gifted," says Mr. Froude, "his industry never tired, his intellect was true to itself, and no worldly motives ever tempted him into insincerity."

The great mass of the writings of Erasmus are only of interest to scholars. His two popular books are the *Colloquies* and the *Praise of Folly*, both written in Latin, but translated into most of the European tongues. The *Colloquies* were rendered into fine, nervous English by N. Bailey, the old lexicographer. The *Praise of Folly*, illustrated with Holbein's drawings, is also to be read in English, in the translation of Sir Roger L'Éstrange; a writer who, if he was sometimes coarse and slangy, had a first-rate command of our language, and was never lacking in racy vigour.

Erasmus wrote the *Praise of Folly* in the house of Sir Thomas More, with whom he lodged on his arrival in England in 1510. It was completed in a week, and written to divert himself and his friend. A copy being sent to France, it was printed there, and in a few months it went through seven editions. Its contents were such, that it is no wonder, in the words of Jortin, that "he was never after this looked upon as a true son of the Church." In the orthodox sense of the term, it would be difficult to look upon the writer of this book as a true Christian.

Folly is made to speak throughout. She pronounces her own panegyric. She represents herself as the mainspring of all the business and pleasure of this world, yes, and also of its worship and devotion. Mixed up with capital fooling, there is an abundance of wisdom, and shrewd thrusts are delivered at every species of imposture; nay, religion itself is treated with derision, under the pretence of buffoonery.

Long before Luther began his campaign against the sale of Pardons and Indulgences, they were satirically denounced by Erasmus. He calls them "cheats," for the advantage of the clergy, who promise their dupes in return for their cash a lot of happiness in the next life; though, as to their own share of this happiness, the clergy "care not how long it be deferred." Erasmus anticipated Luther in another point. Speaking of the subtle interpreters of the Bible in his day, who proved from it anything and everything, he says that, "They can deal with any text of scripture as with a nose of wax, and knead it into what shape best suits their interest." Quite as decisively as Luther, though with less passion and scurrility, he condemns the adoration of saints, which he calls a "downright folly." Amidst a comical account of the prayers offered up to their saintships, he mentions the tokens

of gratitude to them hung upon the walls and ceilings of churches; and adds, very shrewdly, that he could find "no relics presented as a memorandum of any that were ever cured of Folly, or had been made one dram the wiser." Even the worship of the Virgin Mary is glanced at—her blind devotees being said "to think it manners now to place the mother before the Son."

Erasmus calls the monks "a sort of brainsick fools," who "seem confident of becoming greater proficient in divine mysteries the less they are poisoned with any human learning." Monks, as the name denotes, should live solitary; but they swarm in streets and alleys, and make a profitable trade of beggary, to the detriment of the roadside mendicants. They are full of vice and religious punctilios. Some of them will not touch a piece of money, but they "make no scruple of the sin of drunkenness and the lust of the flesh."

Preachers are satirized likewise. They are little else than stage-players. "Good Lord! how mimical are their gestures! What heights and falls in their voice! What toning, what bawling, what singing, what squeaking, what grimaces, making of mouths, apes' faces and distorting of their countenance; and this art of oratory, as a choice mystery, they convey down by tradition to one another." Yes, and the trick of it still lives in our Christian pulpits.

"Good old tun-bellied divines," and others of the species, come in for their share of raillery. They know that ignorance is the mother of devotion. They are great disputants, and all the logic in the world will never drive them into a corner from which they cannot escape by some "easy distinction." They discuss the absurdist and most far-fetched questions, have cats' eyes that see best in the dark, and possess "such a piercing faculty as to see through an inch-board, and spy out what really never had any being." The apostles would not be able to understand their disputes without a special illumination. In a happy phrase, they are said to spend their time in striking "the fire of subtlety out of the flint of obscurity." But woe to the man who meddles with them; for they are generally very hot and passionate. If you differ from them over so little, they call upon you to recant; if you refuse to do so, they will brand you as a heretic and "thunder out an excommunication."

Popes fare as badly as preachers, monks, and divines. They "pretend themselves vicars of Christ." Reference is made to their "grooms, ostlers, serving men, pimps, and somewhat else which for modesty's sake I shall not mention." They fight with a holy zeal to defend their possessions, and issue their bulls and excommunications most frequently against "those who, at the instigation of the Devil, and not having the fear of God before their eyes, do feloniously and maliciously attempt to lessen and impair St. Peter's patrimony."

Speaking through the mouth of Folly, the biting wit of Erasmus does not spare Christianity itself. "Fools," he says, "for their plainness and sincerity of heart, have always been most acceptable to God Almighty." Princes have ever been jealous of subjects who were too observant and thoughtful; and Jesus Christ, in like manner, condemns the wise and crafty. He solemnly thanks his Father for hiding the mysteries of salvation from the wise, and revealing them to babes; that is, says Erasmus, *to fools*. "Woe unto you scribes and pharisees" means "Woe unto you wise men." Jesus seemed "chiefly delighted with women, children, and illiterate fishermen." The blessed souls that in the day of judgment are to be placed on the Saviour's right hand "are called sheep, which are the most senseless and stupid of all cattle."

Nor would he heal those breaches our sins had made by any other method than by the "foolishness of the cross," published by the ignorant and unlearned apostles, to whom he frequently recommends the excellence of Folly, cautioning them against the infectiousness of wisdom, by the several examples he proposes them to imitate, such as children, lilies, sparrows, mustard, and such like beings, which are either wholly inanimate, or at least devoid of reason and ingenuity, guided by no other conduct than that of instinct, without care, trouble, or contrivance."

"The Christian religion," Erasmus says, "seems to have some relations to Folly, and no alliance at all to wisdom." In proof of which we are to observe; *first*, that "children, women, old men, and fools, led as it were by a secret impulse of nature, are always most constant in repairing to church, and most zealous, devout and attentive in the performance of the several parts of divine service"; *secondly*, that true Christians invite affronts by an easy forgiveness of injuries, suffer themselves like doves to be easily cheated and imposed upon, love their enemies as much as their friends, banish pleasure and court sorrow, and wish themselves out of this world altogether. Nay, the very happiness they look forward to hereafter is "no better than a sort of madness or folly." For those who macerate the body, and long to put on immortality, are only in a kind of dream.

They speak many things at an abrupt and incoherent rate, as if they were actuated by some possessing demon; they make an inarticulate noise, without any distinguishable sense or meaning. They sometimes screw and distort their faces to uncouth and antic looks; at one time beyond measure cheerful, then as immoderately sullen; now sobbing, then laughing, and soon after sighing, as if they were perfectly distracted, and out of their senses.

But perhaps the worst stroke of all against Christianity is the following sly one. Folly is said to be acceptable, or at least excusable, to the gods, who "easily pass by the heedless failures of fools, while the miscarriages of such as are known to have more wit shall very hardly obtain a pardon."

Did space permit we might give several extracts from the *Praise of Folly*, showing that Erasmus could speed the shafts of his satire at the very essentials of religion, such as prayer and providence. Were he living now, we may be sure that he would be in the van of the Army of Liberation. Living when he did, he performed a high and useful task. His keen, bright sword played havoc with much superstition and imposture. He made it more difficult for the pious wranglers over what Carlyle would call "inconceivable incredibilities" to practise their holy profession. Certainly he earned, and more than earned, the praise of Pope.

At length Erasmus, that great injur'd name
(The glory of the priesthood and the shame!)
Stemm'd the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.

Erasmus was, in fact, the precursor of Voltaire. Physically, as well as intellectually, these two great men bore a certain resemblance. A glance at the strong, shrewd face of Erasmus is enough to show that he was not a man to be easily imposed upon; and the square chin, and firm mouth, bespeak a determination, which, if it did not run to martyrdom, was sufficient to carry its possessor through hardship and difficulty in the advocacy of his ideals.

(Reprinted) G. W. FORTÉ.

The mechanical construction of a falsehood is a matter of the gravest import.—*Ambrose Bierce.*

Letters to a Christian Friend

(I) ON "FOLLOWING CHRIST"

Wallasey, November, 1938.

MY DEAR CHARLES,

Here are a few scattered comments, as you requested. The blame be on your own head!

At the outset, I do not consider you a Christian at all; I think you are a humanist and a humanitarian, with a superficial overlay of Christian sentimentality that will easily skim off in any serious examination. Although you seem to have some kind of vague theistic feeling about the universe as a whole (which even you cannot get much more definite than that, and which you yourself regard as secondary), the religious views that you believe you believe are not religious at all in the strict sense of belief in the supernatural and of motives and practices associated with that belief.

You say you are "religious," and you like to think so—because it is still a conventional mode—but a thorough examination of your beliefs would show that most, if not all, are simply of social, ethical and humanitarian mould (completely divorced from any religious motives); and that you have little, if any, really religious belief. To believe in Jesus Christ not as the supernatural son of God, but as an ordinary human being, who was the best and noblest teacher mankind has had, this may be very satisfying to you, but it is certainly not religion, and it is certainly not Christianity.

You say you are "following Christ." I suggest the position is reversed—Christ (your Christ) is following you! Gods always follow their makers, never lead them; and this is equally true of moralized figures of our imagination, whom we call our heroes and our sources of inspiration. Our heroes are always better, braver, nobler than they were.

What happens—in the majority of cases, not only in yours—is that you build up, consciously and unconsciously, a certain code of moral emotions and ideas, all of them from the common funds of humanity, most of them eventually essential to social or associated life over any long period, many of them shared even with the animals. Then, because of the influence of beliefs you were brought up in and beliefs that surround you, you say, "There you are—that's what Christ really was and believed and taught. What a splendid system to follow!" You see, this Jesus Christ of yours (bearing very little resemblance to the Jesus Christ of the Gospels) is a plaster saint with a halo, which your imagination sets up in your mind as a peg for your modern beliefs.

If you were thoroughly modelling your life on the life and teachings of the Christ of the New Testament (apart from the miracles and other aspects in which you conveniently do not believe), you would be a much less decent fellow than I take you for, and than you take yourself for.

Have you never appreciated that the Jesus of the Gospels is really quite a primitive figure? Naturally there are lots of good points that can be taken from their context—men have always allowed their gods at least some good points!—and with delightful dishonesty you concentrate on incidents that show how human he was at times, how loving and tender, how sentimental, forgiving, and tolerant; but with these there goes the other side—his ignorance, his stupidity, his impractical teachings, his inhumanity, his low morality of rewards and punishments, his intolerance and vindictiveness where faith was concerned.

You, of course, do not agree that this other side is as black as I have painted it (you have many charm-

ing "modernist" symbolic interpretations!); but even so, you claim that it is stupidly dogmatic on my part to insist on "all or nothing," and that it is more reasonable to do as you do and accept the good points while rejecting the bad. I have no objection to your doing so at all; but I do object to your saying that by doing so you are "following Christ." For one thing, these things you accept did not arise with Christ at all; they were current in the world at his time and long before his time. Secondly, you are not only omitting large chunks of Christ, but you are absolutely ignoring the one vital point of his teaching—the religious motive, with its hope of reward in heaven and its fear of punishment in hell. You ignore that, of course, because you don't believe in it. But Christ did, and taught it; it is the whole foundation of his teaching. So what!

Nevertheless, you suggest that it is not a question of consistency, but a question of making the best use for humanity of this legacy of the New Testament; and that therefore one is entitled to ignore the religious side in favour of the social side. And you claim that after this surgical operation, the Jesus of the Gospels stands out as a supreme social teacher and leader, who left a noble teaching of a comprehensive social system which should command everyone's admiration, and which, if followed, would transform this poor troubled world into a utopia. Balderdash, Charles, just balderdash!

What was Christ's policy on economics—the chief problem confronting the world to-day? He didn't have one. He didn't need one, and he would hardly be concerned about such questions as "a fair living wage," and "work or maintenance." From his teachings the Roman Catholic Church builds an economic theory of the sacred and eternal inviolability of private property; from his teachings certain Socialists and Communists build an economic theory that he was "the world's first Socialist (or Communist)." Take your choice!

What was his policy on colonies? How would he meet the German demand for the return of her colonies? Nobody knows. Everyone makes up his own mind on the question, and then says that is what Christ would have done. Suppose Germany wants a colony, and the people in the colony don't want him to have it, but Germany says she is going to have it even if it means war. How would Christ get over that one? He advises us to love our friends and our enemies, so presumably Germany should have it; but on the other hand, the people in the colony are our friends or our beloved enemies, too, so presumably Germany should not have it. And if it came to war, naturally no one should resist Germany, because we should "love our enemies," we should "turn the other cheek," "give our coat also," and "resist not evil."

Britain was un-Christian in going into the war of 1914, even if it had been a war "to end war and save democracy," even if it really had been for the sake of outraged Belgium. Christians have got no right to resist evil; they should turn the other cheek. "Blessed are the meek." Wars, exploitation, persecution of the Jews in Germany, all these things should not be resisted just because they are evil; but should be encouraged by turning a meek and complacent face to them, rather than a bold front of defiance. "Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you for my sake . . . great shall be your reward."

Freedom is another great problem in the modern world. What has Christ to say on that? Again, in a social sense, absolutely nothing. Try and find anywhere where he even mentions the idea—except the stupid phrase of finding freedom in faith, which in the practice of his followers has usually meant perse-

cuting men if they claimed freedom outside the faith!

We have touched only one or two isolated aspects to-night, but do you honestly believe, Charles, that these are really good social teachings and foundations for a progressive utopia? Resist not evil—how far do you think we should get if we *didn't* resist evil? Didn't Christ himself resist evil, and on one occasion at least in a very violent form? Don't you, and doesn't everyone, resist evil? Heaven help us if we didn't.

Love your enemies—why? how? One can diminish the circle of one's enemies, and enlarge the circle of one's friends; but to love the enemies of humanity and progress is to vitiate the spirit and struggle for progress and freedom. Did Christ love his enemies, those people who would not listen to his message or his disciples?—he certainly did not; he cursed and swore at them, and he promised them a worse fate on Judgment Day than Sodom and Gomorrah were going to get for all their sins.

Take no thought for the morrow—how far do you think we should get socially and individually if everyone practised this form of thriftlessness? What would Mary say if you spent all your wages on the way home on Friday night, and when she asked you how you were going to live the next week, you replied, "God is good. . . . Consider the lilies of the field, my darling, and take no thought for the morrow"?

So you see why it is impossible to chop off the religious motive from Christ's teaching. Plenty of things like those we have been considering simply don't fit in the social scale of things. But they *do* fit in with a religious scheme, and that's how Christ taught them. A person who was meek and submissive, who turned the other cheek and gave up his coat also, who resisted not evil and took no thought for the morrow—that person might suffer all sorts of social consequences in a mere earthly sense, but what did that matter compared with the glorious rewards he was going to get in heaven? The greater the self-abnegation, the greater the reward. ". . . and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

Take up your Bible again, Charles, and see how this religious motive of rewards and punishments of the "soul" not only runs right through Christ's teaching, but is essential in order to understand and explain that teaching.

My love to Mary and the boys.

Yours affectionately,

R. H. S. STANDFAST.

Correspondence

FEARING CHRISTIANITY

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—“Science, philosophy and history were my earliest loves,” you say. And you believe in science still; you have been just as unable to throw off the prejudices in which you were trained as any Christian.

Footo showed more sense in fearing Christianity than you did in *not* fearing. It is wise to fear a dangerous and malignant wild beast. And every issue of the *Free-thinker* contains evidence it can still bite.

I was bred in a vicarage and a public school, but I suspect you hardly realize how little influence Christianity has in either. In the vicarage nobody ever mentioned God except on Sunday, and then only in church. To mention him, or to quote him as an authority, would have laid one under grave suspicion of being a dissenter, and so outside the pale. I remember my mother changing

her dentist because his waiting-room table was covered with *Joyful News* and similar pious papers. She said she could not trust a man like that. And at school, although St. John's Gospel in Greek was a school subject, and we were all confirmed, it was all as pure a formality as the Sunday white tie—indeed more so; some of us did take pride in a neat white tie, but no one took any in religion. The more scholarly resented having to read St. John, his Greek was so bad.

Yet on further thought perhaps you are right. I do bear some mark of my religious training. Your first "Acid Drop" drops on Horder for saying "thank God." Now I never say "thank God." I never use any such phrases, either as piety or blasphemy. My parents never mentioned God (except in church, where I read novels on the sly). They neither swore nor pietized. They boycotted God. And I find I have a natural tendency to do the same. Indeed the total absence from my speech, however angry, of any allusion to Christ or damnation has given me in some circles a quite unwelcome reputation for piety.

C.H.

THE SCIENTIST AND THE CHURCH

SIR,—In your comments on my article, "The Scientist and the Church," published in the *Rationalist Annual* for 1939, you say that it points out that religion and science are as the poles apart, but comment that it is more necessary to secure a public which will encourage the scientist to express his real opinions without fear.

Actually, I think that both questions arise, perhaps in roughly equal proportions, for we have to remember that many scientists are still fervent supporters of orthodox religion. The departmental mind did not vanish with Newton and Faraday, and Prof. Haldane, in his *Fact and Faith*—to take a typical example of the scientific Freethinker—showed quite clearly that many of his colleagues in the scientific world did not approve of his anti-religious activities.

That the public is not yet in a state to receive the anti-religious views of scientists is certainly true enough, but until scientists themselves prove that they fully appreciate the problem I feel that it will remain necessary to state clearly the Freethinking and Rationalistic attitude on scientific matters.

JOHN ROWLAND.

[We found no fault with Mr. Rowland's opinion that it was necessary to convince scientists that science and religion are as poles apart, but added that in our judgment it was far more necessary to provide a public that was ready for such a recognition. We are quite certain that Mr. Rowland will know many scientists, and other men in position, who know that science and religion are in opposition, but are careful not to say so in plain language just because they are in a position where personal and social consideration exert pressure. And our reading of the history of reform is that scientists have not, with rare exceptions, dwelt upon the antagonistic character of their conclusions in religious belief. Even in the case of Lyell Bain pointed out that although he kept silence in public, his unbelief was dragged from him at the dinner table. Nor was Darwin anxious to stress the irreconcilable nature of his theory with religion, and T. H. Huxley played about with the idea of evolution long enough before he came into the open, and sought shelter for his actual Atheism by the invention of Agnosticism. Experience shows that outspoken Freethought has been mainly the work of ordinary people, and those in high places, or in official positions, have depended upon the work done in creating an environment which would make anti-religious opinions reasonably safe. Of course, we do not mean by what is here said that those who did speak out were not dependent upon the work of scientific men, so far as it had a bearing on the warfare of opinion, only that while the scientist in position supplied the material for the fight, it was the plain man and woman who used the material provided to bomb the religious defences. As to the reticence of public men to identify themselves with really advanced opinions on religion, we are probably in as good a position as anyone in the country. For these men we have every respect from the point of view of ability, but they are not often of the stuff of which a very tame kind of martyr is made.—EDITOR.]

RELIGION IN IRELAND

The most fascinating part of wandering about Ireland is that the people talk so readily, say such surprising things and believe so much that you have forgotten people really do believe. A holiday may be defined as life among people who have never heard of Czechoslovakia. The woman who told me about how St. Patrick had thrown the last of the snakes into the lake was probably used to tourists, but I found in conversation with a lad who had not long left school that he sincerely believed the legend of St. Patrick and the snakes. Another man, the head of a family and an intelligent farmer, assured me in all good faith that I could see a rock stained for ever with the blood of a priest who was killed by the British, and in another place the hoof marks of a horse which had leapt over the rocks with a priest on its back in an attempt to escape the Redcoats in the bad old days of the penal laws. The children all learn Irish at school and have to know it to obtain jobs in the Civil Service, but there are not many districts outside Connemara where one hears Irish spoken, and the young men and women I talked to had forgotten most of what they had learnt. In the parish I stayed in every single person who could walk or ride a bicycle was at Mass on Sunday morning, and though I thought the celebration perfunctorily performed, and although not a word was intelligible to anyone present, there was no doubt of the faith of the congregation or of the consolation it brought them. The priest's authority still seemed immense, though I heard complaints of the extortionate dues he extracted for a marriage or a christening. He had taken £20 from one farmer for marrying him, and seldom got less than £1 from even the poorest home. The two young men I got to know best were both devout Catholics, but not comforted by it as their elders seemed to be; their one desire was to get away from those Irish bogs which a foreigner like myself might think beautiful, but which offered no release from a narrow life of toil and poverty.

From "The New Statesman."

When will Thou teach the People—?

WHEN wilt thou teach the people,
God of justice, to save themselves—?
They have been saved so often
and sold.

O God of justice, send no more saviours
of the people!

When a saviour has saved a people
they find he has sold them to his father,
They say: We are saved, but we are starving.
He says: The sooner will you eat imaginary cake in the
mansions of my father.
They say: Can't we have a loaf of common bread?
He says: No, you must go to heaven, and eat the most
marvellous cake.—

Or Napoleon says: Since I have saved you from the ci-
devants, you are my property, be prepared to die for
me, and to work for me.—

Or later Republicans say: You are saved,
therefore you are our savings, our capital
with which we shall do big business.—

Or Lenin says: You are saved, but you are saved whole-
sale.

You are no longer men, that is bourgeois;
you are items in the Soviet State,
and each item will get its ration,
but it is the Soviet State alone which counts
the items are of small importance,
the State having saved them all.—

And so it goes on, with the saving of the people.
God of justice, when wilt thou teach them to save them-
selves?

"Pansies," by D. H. LAWRENCE.

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