

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions

### Taboos

In his retirement ex-Dean Inge cannot be considered an unmixed blessing to the Church. He writes a weekly article for the *Evening Standard*, reproduced in other papers, and what he says with regard to religious belief must make some of his brother clergies squirm. The pity is that Dean Inge did not say these liberal things where they were most needed—in the pulpit. Liberal things about religion are said by many parsons nowadays, but usually in the press or the public platforms. Once in the pulpit they return to the old crudities with the implication that their belief in these orthodox doctrines remains substantially undisturbed. It is a pity that Dr. Inge did not, while he was in the pulpit, say the things about religious beliefs that he now often says in his retirement.

A defence of this policy is often made by saying that people do not go to church to listen to criticisms of religion. That apology evades the real issue, and is quite wrong in substance. To criticize is to pass a reasoned judgment on a given subject; it is not confined to either praise or blame. When preachers praise God for his wisdom or his goodness they are as surely indulging in criticism as when anyone out of the pulpit says that the wisdom of God has its limitations and that his goodness is open to question. The Christian does not object to criticizing God; he goes to Church for that purpose. But he demands that the criticism of God must be a favourable one; he loves to listen to the parson criticizing God, but he insists that it must be in terms of praise. Then he sings "Praise the Lord." But if it is an unfavourable criticism he calls it blasphemy and damns the critic. The only way in which a Christian attending Church can avoid hearing God criticized is to fall fast asleep directly he enters the building, and not wake even in time for the collection. Liberal-minded parsons should give unprejudiced criticism where it would do the most good—in the pulpit. A little more fearlessness in the pulpit, a little more

straightforwardness of speech, might lead to the development of better men and women. It is true that it might lead to a rapid decline in church attendances, but one cannot have anything in this world without paying for it.

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### The Meaning of "Taboo"

A recent article by Dr. Inge dealt with taboos, in the imposition of which he has spent the larger part of his life. But the pulpit habit of distorting a truth that must be told dies hard. Dr. Inge furnishes a good example of this: He defines a "taboo" as "something which is forbidden—no questions asked." That definition is not inaccurate, but is inadequate; and its inadequacy has the effect of making the definition misleading, and to that extent incorrect. Of course a taboo is something that must not be done, but there are thousands of things that must not be done which no one would dream of describing as taboos. The law says I must not pick my neighbour's pocket; a mother warns her child that it must not play with the fire; a doctor orders a patient to avoid red meat. There are a thousand and one prohibitions, but no scientifically-minded person would dream of calling them "taboos." Certainly a taboo is something that must not be done, but it must not be done for an understood and sufficient reason. If no questions are asked it is because the reason for the taboo existing is well understood. Dr. Inge is not fair to his readers; he misleads them by instruction. It really looks as though Dean Inge while no longer in the pulpit is still of it. Where telling the whole truth is concerned religion still lives as an instance of a taboo.

The whole significance of "taboo" is religious. A thing becomes "taboo" not because it is something forbidden; it is forbidden because of certain supernatural consequences that will follow the breaking of the taboo. When a certain food may not be eaten, or, if eaten, in a ceremonial manner only, it is because of supernatural associations. The Jew who will not eat pork is illustrating a survival of animal worship. Our sabbatarianism is a taboo because the Sabbath is said to be a day devoted to God, although it is derived from a "sabbath" which was observed because the supernatural influences controlling that day would have made the doing of certain things dangerous. The refusal of Jesus to permit a woman to touch him, after the resurrection, is an example of the belief in a dangerous supernatural influence that was supposed to be associated with females. When court etiquette demands that a man must not come into close contact with a king, we have an example of the belief that the king is an incarnate god, and that close contact with an ordinary human would be dangerous for the latter. The god-king was a live wire that needed insulating for the benefit of the subject. The taboo placed on revealing the real name of the Bible



god was due to the belief that an enemy might work magic with a name, and so the power of the god might be undermined. The real name of the Egyptian god Ra was kept secret for this reason. In parts of South-east Europe a child is given two names, the real one that is kept secret to avoid magic and another pseudo-name for general use. Sacred prostitution, the prostitution of a virgin in the temple, is again an illustration of a taboo. For only by this method was it believed that a man could protect himself from the supernatural influence emanating from intercourse with a virgin.

Almost any modern scientific work on the beginnings of religious beliefs will supply hundreds of illustrations of the power of taboo. It is man's utter dependence on the gods for whatever he needs to maintain life that makes the taboo so powerful. Those who care to consult the third volume of Frazer's *Golden Bough* will find many hundreds of examples of the taboo, and will also, if they have the wit, be able to trace the significance of existing customs, from "common" superstitions among the "people" up to the ceremonial of a court presentation or a coronation service. And the main feature in the taboo is the element of fear. Remove the factor of fear and religion is left unexplainable. Such things as "sacred" books or places or buildings furnish other examples of the taboos. It was taboo for anyone to use the "host" wrongly because the anger of God would be excited. A Church is taboo for certain functions because that, again, would anger God. In the South Seas when a man puts a "taboo" on a tree, or any object he values, it means, not merely that use of it or injury to it is forbidden, but that the tabooed object is now under the protection of a God and that those who break the taboo will be punished by him. The essence of the "taboo" is a religious prohibition.

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#### Religion and Conservatism

Now I do not mean to imply that Dean Inge defined a "taboo" in the way he did in order to mislead his readers. He adopted the language of the man in the street without pausing to consider that the essence of taboo is a religious belief, not that something is forbidden. I take it that not being in the habit of tracing religion back to its origin in the fear and ignorance of primitive humanity, hardened also by years of life in the pulpit, and irritated by the troublesome interference of cranks, he let loose the word "taboo" as suggesting fussy and ignorant people who are never happy unless they are regulating others. It is annoying to a man who is peacefully devouring a beef steak to be attacked by a ferocious vegetarian, or for a man who is quietly drinking a glass of beer to be denounced by one who is intoxicated with the vision of a world devastated by drunkenness. Probably the ideas of most people concerning reform never get beyond a repetition of "Thou Shalt Not." It never strikes them that the achievement of freedom may consist in destroying prohibitions as well as imposing them.

Dr. Inge says that "religion is the most conservative instinct in the world, and has preserved many antiquated absurdities and petrified fossils of thought and practice." I do not agree with "religious instinct" because there is no such thing, but it is true that religion has preserved a host of antiquated absurdities and petrified fossils of thought. But this is because religion is in its essence an antiquated absurdity, although the power of the taboo frightens people to such an extent that few are allowed to speak of it as what it is. Who but those who live mentally in the past can take the prayers and religious processions, the incantations of priests, the posturings of a

pope and a bevy of cardinals, the chatter about virgin births, sacred days and sacred books, and so on without end, without turning their back upon the present and worshipping "antiquated absurdities"?

These beliefs die very slowly, and even when they are officially dead they still flourish in a more or less clandestine manner. Nor is this attachment to outworn forms of thought confined to the "lower classes," they are just as common with the "upper" strata of society. There is nothing commoner than to find the crown of the king, the robe of the judge, the cap of the professor, the uniform of the general, the learning of the "man of letters," and even the authoritative knowledge of the scientific specialist, accompanied by beliefs that have their roots in the most primitive phase of human existence.

This is a commonplace of experience, but there is another feature to be noted that is not so generally seen. Taboos had their origin in the fear of the supernatural. Men were afraid to do and dare because of those grim and incalculable gods that were believed to govern human destiny. The belief in some of these dies, but even then they leave behind them a legacy in the shape of a fear of change, a suspicion of hidden and incalculable dangers which make men bear the ills they have rather than run the risk of offending the unknown. Men have the courage to dare the unknown on the physical level. Nothing on earth, under the sea or in the air, will deter them in these directions. But it is when the call comes for adventure on the higher intellectual level that the spirit of adventure falters, and we find men falling back on a state of fear that is a direct outcome of the phase of mind that created the "taboo."

The power of the "taboo" is responsible for our inheritance of what Dr. Inge properly calls petrified fossils of thought and practice. But it has done more than that. It has given us a fear of change that strikes at the root of orderly progress. But change is of the essence of progress, and the nation that dreads change invites stagnation. At the present moment we are witnessing the handing over of at least a third of the population of Europe to a more revolting tyranny than the world has ever before seen, because gangs of lying statesmen have been able to work upon this ingrained fear of change, this heritage of the taboo. A little more intellectual courage on the part of the people would have crippled the power of those who have by lies and double-dealing brought our world to the pass it has reached. We would not take the intellectual risks, and we pay for it in the coin of human suffering and the threatened disruption of civilization.

So it has been through history. In all the reforms that have been won during the past century and a half, the fight for the equality of the sexes, the struggle for a proper system of education, for freedom of thought and speech, the root obstacle has been that fear of change which is a direct heritage from the "taboo." We do not advance from precedent to precedent so much as we strive to repeat precedents in a never-ending succession. We do not so much strive to improve on our ancestors as to repeat them. Much of the vitality has gone out of the "taboo," but we still worship at its shrine and shiver in the shadow of its name.

CHAPMAN COHEN

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In sad truth may it be said that, so far as a knowledge of the nature of mental disease and of the proper mode of its treatment is concerned, mankind owes no thanks, but, on the contrary, much error and infinite human suffering, to theology and metaphysics.—*Maudsley*.



## More Freethought Memories

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,  
I summon up remembrance of things past.

Shakespeare

AMONG the Old Guard of Freethought, those stalwarts who died but never surrendered, no name is more honoured than that of Edward Truelove. A bookseller and publisher, his place of business was at Holborn, in "London's central roar." When I first began to haunt his shop, I was very young and he was old, and as peppery as an Anglo-Indian Colonel. On my venturing to ask him if a certain row of books were a shilling each, as one was so marked, he said: "Young man, books are not bricks, all one price." But when he found that I was a brother in the Cause, although a very little brother, he became more genial.

To this day it is puzzling how he made that shop pay. Week after week, month after month, the stock never seemed to alter. The same volumes rested in the same places like dusty books on library shelves. In the "eighties" he was actually displaying remainder pamphlets by Holyoake and Southwell and other Freethinkers of an earlier generation. The only books that seemed to sell were copies of *The Elements of Social Science*, and some American importations. Indeed, *The Elements* was Truelove's "best seller" at that time, and was his own publication. Being new copies, they stood out from the old stock like Snow White among the seven dwarfs.

It was one of these American imported books which was the cause of poor old Truelove's imprisonment when over seventy years of age. The Christians hated him, and used to visit his shop with the intention of seeking indictable material suitable for a prosecution. They got their chance with this volume by Robert Dale Owen, advocating birth-control, now a mere commonplace. With characteristic ingenuity and venom, they construed this into a charge of selling an obscene book, and the veteran Freethought publisher was sent into durance vile. It was a cruel and despicable thing to do to an old man, but what could be expected from a creed responsible for the St. Bartholomew Massacre, the burning of heretics, and the wholesale murder of *witches*, the most defenceless of their sex. True, that the old bookseller was imprisoned, but like Wordsworth's "Happy Warrior," he "found comfort in himself and in his cause."

How Robert Forder escaped the eager clutches of the bigots is a miracle greater than any in the Christian "Gospels." The shop in Stonecutter Street, on the site of which the *Star* newspaper offices were built, was the Mecca of all Freethinkers, and Forder and his assistants sold everything heretodox. The place was actually raided more than once. One Thursday I walked into the shop and found it full of police and the place in a turmoil, and had to buy my weekly budget at a neighbouring newsagent. Forder was one of the best known men in the Freethought Movement. As Secretary of the National Secular Society, and as publisher, bookseller, and wholesale distributing agent, he knew everybody, friends and foes alike. His business, which must have been considerable, was conducted in the smallest office I have ever seen, if, indeed, it could be dignified by such a name. It was a mere hole in the wall, and when a client had to be interviewed, Forder had to step out to make room for the visitor. In those days I used to visit the shop regularly on publishing day, which was a social rendezvous for the "saints" from all parts of London.

Filled with missionary zeal, I took weekly a dozen copies of the *Freethinker*, which was then only a penny a copy, and began distributing the surplus on the way home. It was in this way that I met J. I.

Mackenzie on a South London tram. Sitting next to what appeared to be a stockbroker, or solicitor, or some kind of professional man, I got into conversation, and then, producing one of my papers, asked him if he were acquainted with it. "Not only do I read it, but I also write for it," he said smilingly, I asked him who he was, and I recall his whimsical reply in broad Scots: "Mackenzie, if it doesn't make any difference."

"Mac" was a character. Outwardly, he was officialdom at its best and bravest, and it was as impressive as the Rock of Gibraltar in those far-off Victorian days. At heart, however, he was a red Republican. He wrote rollicking verses in the *Freethinker*, hundreds of them, and Forder published a selection under the catchy title: "Brimstone Ballads." In my impulsive way, I dubbed him: "The Laureate of Secularism," but he would have none of it. "I know too well what a real poet should be to imagine that I am one," he said. "Mac" had an affectionate hand-clasp, and I remember his whimsical parting remark: "Although I don't wish you any harm, may the Lord be with you."

Living in South London, I attended the Secular Hall, new Church Road, Camberwell, which was then at the height of its popularity. Those Sunday nights were a feast of reason and a flow of soul. There were about fifty Freethought lecturers at that time, and most of them must have gravitated to Camberwell. At one period there was a string band and vocalist before the lecture, and the place was always crowded. There was also much week-day activity at the Hall, which was, in its way, a social centre for the saints. On special occasions Victor Roger and other stalwarts used to come from neighbouring Lambeth. In my youthful enthusiasm I joined the latter branch, and met F. A. Davies, who was already making a name for himself in the movement. It was under his kindly eyes that I sweated tallow candles whilst delivering my first open-air lecture at the Triangle, Kennington Gate. How the audience stood my efforts without chloroform has always mystified me.

In my time, the Camberwell Branch had two live-wire secretaries: a Mr. Rose, who afterwards went to South Africa, and Dick Lees. Both were recipients of presentations from the Branch for their services, and they richly deserved it, for they helped to keep the old flag flying in South London for many years. The open-air meeting-place of the Camberwell Branch was at the side of a railway, and very near a Congregational Chapel, in the Camberwell New Road. The minister-in-charge was the Rev. A. J. Waldron, afterwards the notorious "infidel-slayer," who had then just emerged from a theological college. Mischievously, I lured him from his pulpit by posting him one of my weekly dozen copies of the *Freethinker*, with a polite note informing him that Freethought meetings were held close to his Church. He rose to the bait. The following Sunday, after service, he made his appearance, and asked a question or two. Arthur Moss was the lecturer, and he was surprised to see a parson among the hecklers. I introduced myself to Waldron, and then began an acquaintanceship which lasted to his death.

I had never known any sky-pilots, except at a distance, and Waldron's type interested me. He was then so innocent that, filled with theological rubbish, he actually thought that there was no such thing as an Atheist, and here, at his own church-door, was a jolly crowd of Freethinkers, fired with missionary enthusiasm. He had never seen a Freethought publication until I showered books and pamphlets upon him, and his amazement was piteous. He would read them, and throw them aside, and return to them again. Having small courage, he dared not disclose



his doubts to his own Christian circle, so he turned to me, and I, a full-blown Atheist, found myself, surprisingly, acting as father-confessor to a parson. I tumbled my small library upon him, and put him through a course of study, and let the leaven of reason work. Intellectually, the battle was won, but he had his living to get, so he became a "rice-Christian." He wanted a comfortable existence, and there was not the remotest hope of such a thing in the ranks of Free-thought. So he stopped where he was. In his further search for comfort he left the Nonconformists and joined the State Church; and he left the Church of England to become a journalist and playwright. He died a saddened and disappointed man. The last time we foregathered at a café near Chancery Lane, London, he told me he had hopes of making me a Christian when he first met me, but I had converted him. He shook hands twice at our parting, and must have had a premonition of the end. He has been accused, not unjustly, of most unfair attacks on Freethought and Freethinkers. Actually, this was due to the fact that he fully realized that he had no case, and that he could do nothing but "abuse the plaintiff's attorney." Could the Freethought Party have offered him an easy and comfortable living, he would have joined it, but he dreaded hardship and poverty. Until he mixed with the professional "infidel-slayers" of the Christian Evidence Society he had no knowledge of their nauseous methods of propaganda. Fond of spouting Robert Browning's poems, Waldron might have noticed that there was so much in common between himself and "Bishop Blougram." He wore the enemy's uniform, fought on the wrong side, yet I never hated him. "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn."

MIMNEMUS

## Tom Paine's Message to Our Day

As we go through life there comes a time to all progressive-minded people, a time of dismay and despair. We feel that the cause that we have set our minds on is making no headway; indeed, that it is slipping back. We hear our enemies mock us, and our false friends urge us to give up a futile struggle. As Tom Paine wrote during the darkest hour in the American War of Independence, "These are the times that try men's souls."

Of course, this feeling, this mood—for it is primarily a matter of emotion—may be due to some general emotional change in ourselves—induced by staleness or ill-health. But there may be more solid grounds for our momentary despair. Our Cause may not be going well; it may be marking time or slipping back. We may find too that our colleagues and comrades share our feeling. Anybody familiar with the Law of Growth knows that growth in a living thing proceeds by jumps; goes by fits and starts. There are periods of exhaustion, when the organism recruits its strength for a further leap forward. At such a time there may even be apparent retrogression. If we were rational beings we should not let these periods disturb our equanimity, knowing them to be but natural periods, such as sleep or hibernation. But when the mood of depression comes it cannot be reasoned away, and in any case man, being the poor fish that he is, is not greatly given to rationalism.

Since this feeling cannot be reasoned away, what then are we to do? Yield to the despair, throw up the sponge; or, on the other hand, fight it? There is much to be said for both attitudes. Nothing endures; moods pass—sometimes as quickly as they come—and we are again back in the fighting-line. But those of more heroic build—shall we say, like those reading

these lines?—will probably prefer to stand up to this despondency, and if they must go down, go down fighting.

For those, therefore, who would fight out this battle with themselves there are certain actions that may help us. In fact *activity* is a sovereign cure for moods. The active man has no time for the luxury of despondency. Activity is the cure prescribed by the gods themselves. Perhaps the classic case of despondency is that of the Hebrew prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb. You will remember that fleeing from an irate woman called Jezebel he went into the wilderness and lay under a juniper tree. He requested that he might die, for, said he, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." Later, on the Mount, he told Jehovah that his prophets had been slain and "I, even I only, am left." Jehovah cured Elijah's black mood by giving him a good meal and told him to get busy on a new job. A good meal and a new job will often do the trick, and the modern Elijah will go off and find that, after all, he is not the only prophet of the true god, but that there are seven thousand others in Israel that have not bowed the knee to Baal.

Elijah's case was clearly one of low spirits due to improper or inadequate feeding, but there still remain more substantial reasons for despair. The times may be out of joint. Most thoughtful people must assuredly feel that that is the case here and now, in the England of 1939. For this we need more than a "blow out," and a little exercise. The cure in this case is, I venture to suggest, a reading of the *Lives of the Saints*. If one is a Christian the Saints will naturally be those of that faith, and if one is a rebel against established order (as nearly all deep thinkers are, and should be) then our exemplars (from the study of whose lives we draw renewed vigour and refreshment), our exemplars, our saints, will be the great rebels of the past. Naturally it is best that they should be of our own race and speak our own tongue, for then they are more likely to encounter our particular difficulties. If, too, they belong to our sex and class, still better. The English progressive of to-day has a large number of secular saints from which to choose. The one about whom I am going to seek to interest you is Thomas Paine, more frequently referred to by the briefer name of Tom Paine. This abridgement of his first name, of course, gives us a hint as to how his countrymen regarded him, for such a shortening of a name is a sign of affection or of contempt. In this case it was both.

You may be wondering why among so many eligible names I should pick on that of Thomas Paine. Wordsworth, a poet, when he was distressed about the condition of England in his day, turned to Milton, another and greater poet. I think many of you will know his sonnet beginning "Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour: England hath need of thee: she is a fen of stagnant waters," etc., etc. Wordsworth called on Milton "to raise us up, return to us again." Well, each man to his taste, to his hero. Wordsworth, a thoroughly respectable middle-class Anglican gentleman turns to the respectable puritan Latin secretary of Cromwell. But though Paine wrote some indifferent verse, I, a poet, do not turn to him on that ground. Perhaps the fact that my name also is Thomas has something to do with it. In any case both the Thomases are sceptics, like the late Thomas Didymus, the prototype of all doubting Thomases. More seriously, however, I have several reasons for my choice. It is time I told you something of the man himself. This is necessary for two reasons: one, that this is an unlettered age, in which a man who is not referred to by the B.B.C. simply has no chance of being remembered, and, two, that as our man is so



thoroughly unrespectable there is small chance of the B.B.C. ever mentioning him.

Here is a brief outline of Tom Paine's career: Paine was born in England in 1737, just over two hundred years ago, and he died in America in 1809. This is what a modern English writer has said of him:—

No writer in history has created such a stir in the world and Napoleon the First declared that a statue of gold ought to be erected to Thomas Paine in every city in the universe. His pamphlet *Common Sense* united the Americans in 1776 and caused them to fight for national independence. Then, at critical moments in the war that followed, he issued *The Crisis*, which stiffened the resistance of the nation and inspired it with confidence. George Washington paid tribute to the "powerful effect" of his writings, and it was said that the English people owed the loss of their American colonies more to Tom Paine than to anyone else; except, of course, George III.

Having lit the fire of freedom in the New World, he returned to England and would have provoked another revolution with his book *The Rights of Man*, if William Pitt had not silenced the clamour it created by declaring war on the new French Republic. Paine was outlawed by Great Britain, sat as a deputy in the French Convention, tried to save the life of Louis XVI., incurred the animosity of Robespierre, escaped the guillotine by a miracle, made Napoleon lose his temper, and wrote *The Age of Reason*, which aroused such a storm in the religious world that he became the most unpopular figure on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

That puts the matter succinctly, but I want to emphasize four words in the last sentence. "*The most unpopular figure.*" I'll say he was. In England we have two ways of dealing with those that are unpopular, that offend our notions of what is proper. One is to burn them in effigy, another to boycott them. Paine was quite used to the first form of disapproval. For many years he lived at Lewes, in Sussex. As you probably know that delightful old city is famous for the number of effigies of Guido Fawkes that it burns on the fifth of November in each year. The word boycott had not been invented in Paine's time, but the boycott was a real thing. Of the two methods of disapproval the boycott is undoubtedly the most powerful in its effect.

"*The most unpopular figure.*" Why, you may ask should that fact so arouse my enthusiasm? As Earl Balfour once said of Epstein's panel "Rima" (on the Hudson Memorial in Hyde Park), "A work of art is not necessarily good because it is disliked." True; but if we enquire into the exact connotation of the word "unpopular," light begins to dawn. The longer we live the more do we recognize that that method of fighting which is calculated to hurt the enemy most is precisely that which he denounces as most ungentlemanly. In the late war the German policy of unlimited employment of submarines in sinking our merchant ships was the most "caddish" thing they did, for it nearly won the war for them. The same indignation is now heaped on Franco for introducing machine-gunning of peasants in the fields and refugees on the roads; but this ungentlemanly conduct of this "Christian gentleman" (to quote Sir Henry Page Croft) contributed greatly to winning his war. I only mention these matters, not to excuse them, but as illustrations of my thesis that that which we most dislike in our enemy is probably his strongest and most efficient contribution to whatever struggle he may be engaged in. I conclude, therefore, that that part of Paine's activities that caused him to be so unpopular was by far the most valuable, and probably the best weapon he could use.

BAYARD SIMMONS

(To be continued)

## Letters to A Christian Friend

### (8) THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS EXAMINED

MY DEAR CHARLES,

We now come to the final and most important stage of our informal examination of Christian origins and of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ—an analysis from the social utilitarian point of view.

Our search, fragmentary though it has had to be, and in most directions suggestive rather than exhaustive, has led us along a number of roads which to you may have seemed unfamiliar—at first, perhaps, irrelevant—but I am sure you will agree that because of them we are now in a better position to understand the Christian records in their own light, and to decide disputed points on their own merits rather than on the prejudices of later minds.

I propose now to confine myself to the words and actions actually attributed to Jesus, and to run through the Gospels collecting these words and actions, and deciding which of them can be considered as coming within the class of social teachings (good or bad). Then at the end we will gather up those so classified, and see what kind of "social programme" this Jesus has actually bequeathed to us.

I shall be using the Authorized Version of the Protestant translation of the Bible (A.V.), but any important differences in the Revised Version (R.V.) as well as in the Roman Catholic Douay Version (D.V.) will be noted.

Without further comment, then, we take up the Gospel written in the name of Matthew, but—according to the critics—not written by Matthew. We find it a naïve and heavily religious book about a supernatural Jesus Christ ("son of David"), complete with virgin birth, apparitions of angels to announce the tidings, the star in the east and the wise men, temptations by the Devil, ministrations by angels, miracles and healings galore, and the resurrection in all its glory. Not a promising start!—but let me not hold the writer's religio-magic flights against you except where they are accepted or supported by Jesus's own words or actions.

Our examination, then, begins at Verse 17 of Chapter iv:—

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (See also Mark i. 14-15; Luke iv., 14-15).

Thus at the start he strikes the keynote of his mission—a religious revival, a call to repentance, announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God, possibly already a glimmering of Messiahship. No social campaign yet. The Douay Version is, "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"—penance is hardly the first thing a modern social reformer recommends to the unemployed and the hungry and the poorer masses!

Next, after the calling of the disciples and various travellings, we come to Chapter V., and the famous and so much misunderstood Sermon on the Mount. First are the beatitudes:—

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. v. 3—Luke's version gives us not "poor in spirit," but: "Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God," vi. 20).

"Poor in spirit"—which is hardly an attitude we want in social life—certainly seems to fit in the Matthew atmosphere better, and "poor" better in the Luke context, so you can have either, or both!

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted (Matt. v. 4—Luke vi. 21: "Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh"; also John xvi. 20).



Incidentally, the great Deliverer prophesied by Isaiah lxi. 1-2) is "to preach good tidings unto the meek (R.V., afflicted; D.V., meek) . . . to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn. . . ."

Blessed are the meek; *for they shall inherit the earth* (Matt. v. 5—see Psalms xxxvii. 11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace").

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; *for they shall be filled* (Matt. v. 6—Luke's version again deserts the spiritual for the more material, "Blessed are ye that *hunger* now; for ye shall be filled," vi. 21).

Blessed are the merciful; *for they shall obtain mercy* (Matt. v. 7).

Blessed are the pure in heart; *for they shall see God* (ver. 8—see parallel, Psalms xxiv. 3-4).

Blessed are the peacemakers; *for they shall be called the children of God* (ver. 9).

But if the poor (who made up the big majority of Jesus's following), and the poor-spirited, the meek, the merciful, the righteous, the bereaved and the afflicted are thus blessed because they are going to receive spiritual compensation or reward, what a change of tone in the fulminations towards those whose worldly lot is better:—

But woe unto you that are rich! *for ye have received your consolation.*

Woe unto you that are full! *for ye shall hunger.*

Woe unto you that laugh now! *for ye shall mourn and weep.*

Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! *for so did their fathers to the false prophets* (Luke vi. 24-26).

The net result so far seems to be that when things are wrong with you in this world, don't worry—heaven is waiting. But if things are comfortable and you can afford to smile at fate a bit, then look out for yourself—God is going to have a crack back at you, and you've a hell of a time coming! What next?

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; *for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you* (Matt. v. 10-12).

Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; *for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets* (Luke vi. 22-23).

The Christian, then, should not resist, or resent, or object in any way to criticism, slanders, revilement, or persecution for the sake of his religious beliefs—he should "leap for joy" at the opportunity of being persecuted, for it will all work out in the end for his own benefit. Pastor Niemoeller and other Christians now being persecuted in Germany and elsewhere because of their courageous stand for their faith and their conscience, should not worry in the least, even if they are being slowly murdered in gaols or concentration camps. They are not suffering any real loss—actually (though, I'm afraid, not intentionally) Hitler and the other oppressors are doing them a good turn! Their reward is the greater in heaven for their sufferings.

Rather a curious attitude towards persecution, and hardly one to be commended from a social point of

view (from which persecution is always a vile and anti-social thing), but there it is—the problem's yours, not mine.

You will have noticed that in this letter the motive-word in each little precept appears in italics—"for great is your reward in heaven"—and I shall continue to follow this method. I have already emphasized frequently the way in which Jesus bases all his teachings on these motives of spiritual rewards and punishments (probably you are as weary of its repetition as I am!), and in going through the teachings I will simply leave the italicized keywords to carry their own silent message without further comment. Again the problem of reconciling the facts with the extravagant moral claims for these teachings, is yours!

Love to Mary and the boys. Affectionately,

R. H. S. STANDEFAST

### Palestine Policeman \*

"PALESTINE POLICEMAN," by Roger Courtney, just published, will make interesting reading for any Freethinker.

Mr. Courtney's books on Jungle Africa have made him well-known to many of our readers. The modern Knight-Errent, he has crammed more experiences into his life than most men would do in a hundred lives.

In this book he gives his eighteen months' experience as a member of the Palestine police force. It is a plain straightforward account of a man who possesses no prejudices to, or likes or dislikes of, either Arab or Jew; though, at the same time, he flays them both with his criticism when necessary, as he apparently did with his truncheon during the riots.

Christians are fond of asking us Freethinkers, "What would the world be without religion?" It would have been an excellent thing for the inhabitants of Palestine if religion had never been heard of.

One of the most interesting chapters in the book is the one on the Festival of the Holy Fire at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Courtney says: "In the church of the Holy Sepulchre are many sects: Greek Orthodox, Latins, Armenians, Copts, Syrians—not to mention the Abyssinian group who, because of poverty, have their church on the roof. All the Sects are so fiercely jealous of one another's privileges and rights, that disturbances among them are always liable to break out among the priests. In one instance it amounted to a considerable uproar. I don't think the police ever found out precisely what started it. All they knew when they stepped in was that the priests were weighing into each other with all their might. They were lashing out with crosses, shoving, pulling and punching. They were ineffectual fighters, they fought frenziedly, mistiming their blows and screaming in shrill angry voices, nearly hysterical. The police had little difficulty in separating and quietening them while the Mahomedan watchman looked on with cynical smiles." So now we see another use for the cross of Christ. It can be used as a weapon to belabour an opponent who holds opinions contrary to yours; and while scenes like these are being enacted in the Holy Land, we have pious journalists and parson politicians telling us that the cause of the world's unrest is that we have deserted the Cross of Christ.

You will not find such descriptions as these in best-sellers like *Where the Master Has Trod*, by H. V. Morton, which sells in thousands to the devout.

Then follows Mr. Courtney's description of the miracle itself—"There were thousands and thousands of pilgrims from all over the world—old men, cripples, and people on stretchers and all manner of sick and suffering were in that mighty throng, for the occasion of the Holy Fire which was believed to have the power of healing." They were all waiting for the miracle to appear—screaming, shrieking, yelling and roaring. One gentleman asserted loudly that he was Elisha, while another proclaimed even more forcibly that he was Jesus. Elisha and Jesus came

\* *Palestine Policeman*, by Roger Courtney, 10s. 6d., published by Herbert Jenkins.



to blows and were separated by an Arab policeman who kicked both their backsides. Then came the dramatic moment of the Festival—the Patriarch went into the Sepulchre; and for what followed let us again refer to Mr. Courtney:—

"A little later the Holy Fire appeared. It came through a large hole in the wall of the Sepulchre—a strong flame some 3 feet long, standing straight out. There was a vague smell of naphtha I think, and saltpetre. The crowd went crazy: roaring, they rushed forward, everyone with a candle, to try to light it at the Holy Fire. The police guarding the Sepulchre were swept aside. The police and the crowd itself were carried helplessly forward in the surging rush. Deafening as was the noise, it became even more deafening when the first candle was lighted. It was worse than a football final. The man with the lighted candle strove to fight his way out through the crowd and out of the church. He hadn't a chance. Not only was there the impassible denseness of the crowd, but people unable to reach the actual Holy Fire for themselves—pressed hard upon him from all directions and lit their candles at his. Hence, although the man himself could not move, the Fire on his candle did. From candle to candle went the flame—one candle lit six, those six lit sixty. Many others lighted their candles at the Holy Fire itself, and their candles thus lit, gave flame to still others. . . . The points of light travelled as if by magic. Almost they had an appearance of being wind-driven. Through the court-yard and into the packed streets beyond, the Fire went. When it reached the outer fringe of the crowd, many of the men turned and ran with it protected in lanterns, making for Bethlehem and other Holy places. Within a short time the Holy Fire had spread all over Christian Palestine. From there, devotees carried it later to Europe. That was what the Miracle of the Holy Fire meant to devotees. To the poor hard-worked police it meant a time of strenuous labour—hours of raging thirst and a deep hatred of the harpies who traded on the religious susceptibilities of others. It also meant uniforms covered in candlegrease."

In Palestine there are Jews, Christians, Mahomedan Arabs and Christian Arabs, united in one thing only—that of hating each other. Yet the dominant note in this book is that the trouble in Palestine to-day, is not so much a racial as a religious question where passions are fanned to fever heat.

There is another chapter on a Moslem procession which the Christians tried to break up, and one cannot help feeling that whatever faults there are in Palestine, the Palestine policeman has a particularly rotten job and tries hard to do it—honestly and fairly—between the warring sects.

This book is not a condemnation of Jew or Arab—Mr. Courtney praises indiscriminately the good qualities of both.

Next to religion the most burning question in Palestine is the hatred of the Arab for the Jewish efficiency. The Jew has astonished the world by showing that, given a little encouragement, he is a first-class agriculturist. On the other hand, the Arab is, and always has been, perfectly hopeless on the land. Some of the stories are really funny, and can be best appreciated by people who have no religion. For example—there is one about some Arabs who captured a man and made him curse the religion of the Nazarene and then made him spit on the Cross. When questioned about this afterwards, he said—"Spitting on the crucifix didn't matter to me at all because you see I am not a Christian, I am a Jew."

Another excellent story is of a vicar who asked Mr. Courtney if he could direct him to the tree on which Judas hanged himself. Mr. Courtney says: "Hot, dusty, thirsty and deafened by the everlasting din of the fanatics, I was tempted to answer with earnest rudeness and irreverence 'Go thou, and do likewise'; but a fellow constable answered instead: 'Along the Bethlehem Road, sir, there are plenty of trees there; take yer pick.' In a land steeped in fakes, one of the greatest is the Judas Tree, where there are charlatans who will point out even the very branch itself! With grim reality ever before us in the shape of riot and murder, we certainly were not interested in fakes."

Freethinkers ought to get this book from their libraries.

F. A. HORNIBROOK

## Acid Drops

We are writing this on April 11, and Parliament meets in two days time. One cannot say exactly what may happen, but the one thing that appears certain is that unless Hitler and Mussolini start something new before Parliament meets the Government will seek further "official information"—probably as to whether Mussolini has seized Albania or not. Mr. Chamberlain has, with stubborn and quite unintellectual heroism publicly professed his faith in the honesty of Mussolini and Hitler, and in the case of the former, promised the House of Commons that he would "eat my hat" if the Anglo-Italian Pact of friendship between himself and Mussolini could not be relied on. Both Hitler and Mussolini have since treated his trust with the most complete contempt, but Mr. Chamberlain is still pursuing the policy of trying to soothe the two bullies—one of whom is an arrant coward—with assertions of faith in their diplomatic statements.

Meanwhile Munich continues to bear a rich crop. Albania is the last to feel the pressure of the men whose honesty Mr. Chamberlain stood warranty for, although Franco—another one in whose honesty Mr. Chamberlain professed faith—has now joined the German-Japanese-Italian Pact, and has placed all the Ports of Spain at the service of Germany and Italy in the event of war with England. And "all the ports" we may rest assured means flying bases, and other military help. The Italian airmen, who showed in both Abyssinia and Spain that they are invincible and absolutely fearless—when dropping bombs on absolutely helpless people—duly bombed the Albanians, and if Mussolini's son was among the bombers, he will probably write home to his father, as he did in the case of Abyssinia, that bombing men, women and children from a hundred feet above ground is glorious sport. The next move lies, apparently, with Mussolini, or with Mussolini and Hitler. And we can rest assured that the Government will order someone to visit these gentlemen to say that Great Britain will feel grieved if these things continue.

We remember reading somewhere of two tribes about to fight when it was discovered that one side was deficient in weapons. Thereupon the poor ignorant "savages" on one side sent the other side some weapons so that they might have a proper kind of contest. We wonder whether it is that kind of feeling that animated the Government of this country when it permitted the exportation of pig-iron to Germany for the year ending in February, 1939 to increase from 2,332 tons in the previous six months to 39,203 tons. And also the French from 23,000 to 204,000 tons? After all if Germany is to arm it must get the metal from somewhere, and it is supremely chivalrous of the British and French Governments to see that the Fascist Governments receive help in piling up arms. Of course, it may be that big business and high finance will demonstrate that money and not human welfare or common decency is the one thing that is truly international or ought to be. People may not live amicably together because of differences of race, colour or creed, but money finds its entrance everywhere and rises clear from all such petty considerations.

A very large book, and also an educational one, might be written on "Curiosities of Christian Evidence." If it were written there ought to be included a portion of a speech by the Secretary of the Christian Evidence Society, the Rev. F. H. E. Harfitt. It seems that some time ago 200 "Fellows of the Royal Society" were asked whether they thought natural science negated the idea of a personal God. We are not told how the 200 were selected, but Mr. Harfitt is cheered by the fact that there was a majority of four to one who said they did not. If the question had been properly framed, and if the answers meant exactly what Mr. Harfitt says they meant, even then the proportion of disbelievers is not bad. But what strikes one is the simplicity (?) of the whole affair. Belief in God is not, save to Mr. Harfitt and the Christian Evidence



Society, and their like, a question of voting, but a question of cogency of reasoning. If Mr. Harfitt's plan had been universally followed, the sun would still be travelling round the earth, witches would still be active, and the Protestant Church would never have existed.

An advertisement signed by the Rev. P. Mahon, a Catholic Priest of Liverpool, appeals for money wherewith to build "the sanctuary and Blessed Sacrament Chapel of the Liverpool Cathedral." The reward for all who give not less than one pound sterling, is to obtain for the next ten thousand years—or longer if necessary—TWO WEEKLY MASSES, and in case this is not sufficient repayment the generous priests throws in "an annual requiem and a Mass every first Friday" (in the month presumably). In case our readers wish to participate all money is to be sent to Col. Sir John Shute, M.P., C.M.G., D.S.O.

We shall soon be quite confused as to how to address our public characters. Here is the gracious lady who presides over the London County Council asking us to address her as "Sir" or "Mr. Chairman," while, at the Bradford Conference of the Free Church Assembly, Mrs. Ernest J. James in delivering the Presidential address spoke of "The Lordship of Christ." Is there then no reciprocity? Surely somebody ought to speak of The Ladyship of the Holy Ghost?

An account of the persecution "behind a smoke screen," of the Roman Church in Germany, is given by Mr. Michael Blair of the *Universe* as the result of first-hand investigation, and it must make very unpleasant reading for the faithful. All teachers in the Reich have to take the following oath:—

Adolf Hitler, we swear that we will train the youth of Germany that they will grow up in your ideology, for your aim and purposes, in the direction set by your will. This is pledged to you by the whole German system of education from the primary school through to the University.

In addition to this, it was also decreed that:—

Any lay teacher can now do the work previously done only by priests. Only those priests can still teach who give a guarantee that nothing in their religious classes will contradict the world view of National Socialism. Teaching must follow the lines laid down by the Ministry. If in any school teachers prepared to follow these conditions are not to be found, there must be no religious instruction; while in High Schools religious instruction can only be given when at least twenty pupils demand it in writing.

But this is not all. If religious instruction be given it must be the last class of the day, while hymns should be avoided like the plague. A new edition of the Catholic Catechism has been published, omitting the Infallibility of the Pope, the Church's claim to be the only true Church, and the indissolubility of marriage. Many of the new songs in schools are against the Pope; while some of the "holiest" claims of the Church, like the Virgin Birth, are openly scoffed at. In fact Roman Catholics are now more than ever understanding what similar persecution on their part directed against "heretics" is like, when forced against themselves. And they do *not* like it.

A "nauseating mixture of hypocrisy, piety, and sanctimonious appeals" was counsel's description of letters written by a married man, Alfred Gradidge, 26, to a 15-year-old East Grinstead (Sussex) girl. Sentenced at the Old Bailey to 15 months imprisonment for taking away the girl unlawfully, Alfred should be a great acquisition to the gaol chaplain or visiting missionaries. His love had such religious fervour that he drew up a document in which the girl did "swear and saith (sic) by Almighty God . . . and by the Holy Bible," to give herself "body and soul to one Alfred Gradidge," and that if ever she broke "this holy oath (1) shall be haunted by the aforesaid Alfred Gradidge . . . so pray to Almighty God to help me carry out and respect this my holy oath of

honour." And for such erudite legal draftsmanship and holy affection poor Alf has to "do time." It's a hard world for sanctified sexuality, and Alf may now vent his loving sighs on the bosom of some friendly warder. (N.B.—Let the superstitious note the significance of initials being the same for both Alfred Gradidge and Almighty God! Ah!)

It would be a mistake on the part of the *Church Times* to assume that the South African natives are not quite alive to the way in which the Churches work hand in hand with "big business." There are, of course, exceptions, as witness the fight Bishop Colenso waged on behalf of justice to the natives. But he was an exception, and a good deal of a heretic.

"Laugh and grow fat" on religion! Of course, we know that many clerics do—and even laugh at it, but that's usually "sub-rosa." However, the Rev. L. W. Farr, of a Congregationalist Church at Dulwich Hill, Sydney, welcomes the laughter of his congregation and would encourage it. "With so many counter-attractions, the Church must be bright," says he. In place of gloomy hymns, he finds that bright hymns, set to different tunes and, sometimes, with new words, appeal to his flock. And he doesn't mind women removing their hats in church. Can't one just picture the hilarious singing of "Fountain filled with blood," "At the cross, at the cross," and other lyrics of joy, the while the "diggers" split their sides against the "gloom?"

Mr. Maurice Reckitt is the chairman of the "League of the Kingdom of God"—which, perhaps, aims at being a rival to the "Christian Front," or "Catholic Action." Its object seems to be a "Recall to Politics"—but politics which must have some "Christian realism" as its motive. The idea is that, as our social system is dying, a "Christian" revolution is the only alternative to a "totalitarian" revolution. The *Church Times* wants also a change of "heart and mind," which is not, it adds, encouraged by the "abstract, empty, windy" messages of church leaders. One would have thought, to put it mildly, that the nearly 2,000 years of Christianity imposed on people would have been proof sufficient of its utter fatuity and futility; but, after all, what does it matter? The League of the Kingdom of God is about as dead as if it had never been born.

The Folkestone Medical Officer of Health warns Eltham Rural District Council of danger of rats attacking children in the village of Lyminge. The vermin come from tombs in the cemetery, where they breed. But, should Christians fear what comes from CONSECRATED GROUND? Surely the rats can't be ordinary rats! If they are, what a mess they must have made for identification at the resurrection. Ugh! for better to be cremated and risk being pieced together again from ashes.

The *Church Times*, while always deprecating the fact that so many Anglican Bishops contradict or oppose each other on matters of "doctrine," makes a point of always doing so itself when what it considers the occasion arises. It appears that the Bishop of Birmingham under the guidance of the Diocesan Chancellor, Mr. Cleveland-Stephens, K.C., "has come to the conclusion that the Church has no marriage law, so far at least as the Table of Kindred and Affinity is concerned, other than that of the State," and his clergy have been informed that they can now solemnize in church marriages formerly forbidden, like that with a deceased wife's sister. The *Church Times* looks upon this as rank heresy of the worst kind, and hopes that loyalty to the church will cause clergymen to repudiate their Bishop's suggestion. The Church's marriage laws "are to be found in the teachings of our Lord and St. Paul," and they are far better authority than a heretical bishop like Dr. Barnes. It is all very amusing, but what wonderful "unity" is to be found in the Church of England!



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ONE of our readers in Alberta (Canada) would like to get into touch with other *Freethinker* readers in his neighbourhood. We shall be pleased to give the address of any readers who would wish us to do so.

C. H. SMITH.—Congratulations on what you have done and are doing. Pleased to know how much Mr. Cohen's lecture was enjoyed.

E. MARTIN.—We are feeling all right, although just now very busy with Conference and other matters. We hope to get three or four days off soon after Easter.

G. J. THORNTON.—Thanks for suggestion, but copies of this journal are sent to all who are singled out for criticism. It is one of our invariable rules.

C. TOMLINSON.—No useful purpose that we can see would be served by publishing your lengthy letter, which consists of nothing more than a statement of your own religious belief. The beliefs of ordinary Christians are quite well known to our readers, and a "testimony" that might be interesting to revival meetings, is wanting in interest to readers of a paper such as this one.

C. LEGGETT.—See "Sugar Plums." We hope to deal with a number of comments on *Freethought and the Child* later.

(Mrs.) A. LEE.—Thanks for good wishes, and addresses. Papers are being sent.

J. HUMPHREY.—We cannot say how the silly "chain letter" originated. Sometimes religious fools, sometimes religious rogues, are responsible.

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

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## Sugar Plums

On Wednesday, April 19, Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Beechoft Settlement, Birkenhead. We explained last week the circumstances that have led Mr. Cohen to hold this meeting, and we hope to meet our friends from the surrounding area. His subject is "Freethought and Today." The chair will be taken at 7.30 sharp, and admission is free.

We said, last week, that Mr. Cohen would welcome criticisms of his pamphlet *Freethought and the Child*, because it is not the point of view that Freethinkers have usually adopted with regard to religion and the child. We have therefore pleasure in citing the following from a letter received from our valued contributor, C. Clayton Dove, before the paragraph in last week's issue was written. Mr. Dove writes under date of April 2:—

Both the last *Pamphlets for the People* are, like all the others, very useful instruments of propaganda; but the one entitled *Freethought and the Child* has a beauty and elevation of moral sentiment which are rare indeed in human history.

Mr. Dove is not a man who uses words lightly, and for that reason we appreciate his opinion. We have several other letters, but it will, perhaps, be better to reserve these, and others, which we may deal with generally.

We are not in the habit of pressing the reading of anything we have written upon Freethinkers, but we should like every Freethinker in the country to read this pamphlet, and to introduce it to as many of their semi-religious friends as possible. If children are to grow up Freethinkers in the higher and better sense of the term they must be encouraged to intellectual independence from their earliest years. We do not mean by independence an anarchic frame of mind that has developed because it was without guidance; only that the guidance must be along lines that will develop a sense of independence and a capacity for fearless thought. To turn a heresy into an orthodoxy and to aim at bringing up children as mere copies of their parents is to commit the mistake by religionists without having their excuse for having so badly blundered.

An interesting and instructive report of a meeting of the Nottingham City Council appears in the *Nottingham Guardian* for April 4. The discussion arose on a report of the Watch Committee, recommending the opening of cinemas on Sunday. In common with many similar reports the Nottingham police regarded the opening of cinemas on Sunday as a step which would tend to reduce the number of juvenile criminal offences. There has been a serious increase in this direction, and it was pointed out that the increase was accounted for largely by the offences committed on Sunday evenings. The Watch Committee found that in places where the opening of Cinemas was in force the result had been an improvement in the behaviour of young people in the streets. One would have thought that this alone would be an inducement for reasonable facilities for entertainment on Sunday to be welcomed. But in the end the religious opposition was too strong and the proposal was rejected.

One of the Alderman said they did not want the "Continental Sunday" in Nottingham. On that head we beg to differ. Nottingham evidently does need a little more of the Continental Sunday, and if that were allowed the juvenile population of Nottingham would most probably be better behaved than it is. What the Churches want is a monopoly of Sunday entertainments on Sunday. It is as clear a trade issue as one can conceive. The clergy wish to drive people to Church, and resent any kind of competition. Better behaviour is not the primary consideration of the Churches, regular attendance at Church is. If people will not go to Church then the parsonry says, "let them go to hell." After all, there is no compulsion on anyone to attend a cinema, and the opposition of Nottingham Christians to reasonable entertainment on Sunday is an evidence of how much the clergy really have at heart the well-being of the rising generation. One of the opponents of the Watch Committee's recommendation gave the game away when he said that the clergy had "become alarmed at the falling off in congregations." The Lord is powerful, but it is too much to expect him to stand up against the Cinema.

A recently acquired subscriber, R. Hill, sends the following:—

May I congratulate you on your excellent journal. It is one of the finest periodicals published to-day, with well-thought-out articles that help to clear one's mind of propaganda dished up in various forms and to get down to facts. May you long prosper and still keep your coldly scientific view and philosophic cut.

Thanks! But why "coldly scientific view?" We much prefer "impartial," or just "scientific." Either an impartial view or a scientific view may be as impassioned, as fully charged with feeling, as is the nonsense of the evangelical preacher, the flatulent commonplaces of a Canon Elliot, or the interested vapourings of a Cabinet Minister. Good writing, and forceful writing, must be charged with feeling if it is to get home.



## "When It Was Dark"

or

LESSONS FROM "THE GOLDEN LEGEND"

OVER thirty years ago, the Lord Bishop of London raised arch smiles by enthusiastically belauding a foolish and now forgotten tale, which, under the catch-penny title of *When It Was Dark*, predicted a universal abandonment of Christianity, and portrayed a fine crop of moral evils as resulting from the aforesaid rejection.

Shortly before the learned Bishop played the rôle so often condemned by Solomon in his immortal *Book of Proverbs*, Messrs. Dent & Co. (Aldine House, London, W.C.), had, at a popular price, reproduced in seven volumes Caxton's version of *The Golden Legend*, published by him at his own Press some two hundred years after it had been written (about 1270), by Jacob de Voragine in the Latin tongue. This work takes the Festivals of the Christian Year, and relates from the Bible, and other sources, tales suitable for the instruction of Christian people upon the days mentioned. Nine-tenths of the work record the lives of the saints, and contain the greatest number of falsehoods ever compressed into an equal space. As a comment on the oft-repeated assertion that mankind owes an incalculable debt to the services of Christianity, nothing more scathing and destructive could possibly be imagined; for gloomy indeed is the picture there given of the world at the time when men bowed lowest before the Cross. The debased state of intelligence, the utter lack of social feeling, the insatiable lust for miracles, the dire ignorance regarding nature and man, and the insane zeal about the interests of the supposed soul, awake a sense of sadness and depression, similar to that caused by those long cloisters of the dead in the vast cemeteries of Italy. Repulsive as the task may be, let us, however, stay to examine some of the salient characteristics of the period, when, despite the clearest effulgence of the bright and morning star, there did prevail under its influence a darkness that could be felt.

I. *Credulity*. The habit of sifting evidence, of yielding assent to a statement only after having verified it, is the best guide for conduct, and the surest way to success. Christianity in those days of darkness took the opposite course, electing to walk by faith, especially trust in religious teachers, and belief in the supernatural. The results of this procedure are among the most pitiable and humiliating experiences of humanity. The *Golden Legend*, and innumerable sermons of the period, show that no story was too preposterous, or infantile, for ready acceptance, provided that it came from the lips of a saint, a doctor, or a confessor, or could boast a hoary, if unknown, origin. As regards the propagators of these untruths, beyond doubt many lied deliberately; but, perhaps, the greater part deceived themselves as well as their flocks in consequence of existing prejudices, and the tendency to pursue the beaten track. They had a firm belief in the occurrence of miracles, and this led them to imagine miraculous interventions, or to magnify natural events into signs and wonders. Whether the tales spread by fraud, or by ignorance, matters little as regards the practical conclusion deducible from their existence. For the fact remains that at a time when Europe had been subdued to Christ, when the Holy Sacrifice was offered with fervent devotion, and when the great heart of Christendom lifted itself heavenwards in childlike trust, the Spirit of Truth, the promised Guide and Comforter, allowed his protégés to embrace fictions of the most ridiculous and degrading type. The lies of the Gol-

den Legend are thus direct evidence against the Guidance of the Church by any Ghost more Holy than the lying spirit sent forth to inspire the prophets of Ahab, who no doubt, like the Lord Bishop of London, believed *ex animo* in the supernatural.

II. *Timidity*. There are two things that can crush the human mind, namely the dread of evil spirits, and the fear of death. Now, during the long period when in truth and reality it was dark, Christian teachers did their utmost to promote belief in demons, and to render the thought of death unspeakably ghastly and horrible. Every misfortune incident to human life was attributed to the malignity of fiends, this attribution doubling the evil, and increasing the dread of its occurrence. Death—according to the antique view, a normal event to be awaited with tranquility—became in the medieval conception a prospect occasioning bitter anguish. Imagination presented Devils of hideous forms to the dying saint,<sup>1</sup> as well as to the dying sinner; and both were haunted by the thought of the endless and frightful torments that an inexorable Judge would impose upon them in case of their inadequate repentance and still more of their defective faith. Sculpture and painting, the arts which so accurately reflect prevailing ideas, sank under the weight of these dismal beliefs. The cult of the loathly and the horrific replaced that of the fair and the serene. The portrayal of pain, a thing revolting to the best instincts of human nature, and unknown to ancient art, became the favourite theme of representation. Men of sorrows, mournful and squalid saints, bleeding martyrs, fiends tormenting their victims, the pronouncement of doom, the final conflagration: these and similar subjects, mostly treated in the crudest way, bore witness to the thralldom of foul doctrines, and the enervation caused by persistently refusing to study the beautiful. Indeed the artists of this era were so completely lacking in the sense of loveliness and symmetry, that their delineations of human beings violate every principle of grace and comeliness; and, but for the fact that perception is modified by the prejudices of the percipient, it might be concluded that the people of the period were exceptionally ill-favoured in figure and face.

III. *Fanaticism*. In those ages of darkness, Christianity divided mankind into two classes—the Good, who were good because they accepted it, and the Bad, who were bad because they rejected it. The first was assured of glory and unfading bliss; whilst the second was menaced with infamy and everlasting woe. *The Golden Legend* is full of the sufferings inflicted on guileless saints by unbelieving rulers, and the terrible visitations meted out to the latter in return. It is hard to say whether the gross fabrication of history, or the abominable prejudice here involved, is the more repulsive. Modern research proves conclusively that the noble army of martyrs, whereof the Church has bragged so lustily throughout the ages, is but a drop in a bucket when compared with the host of believers in other religions, who, for refusing to abandon their ancient faiths, were ruthlessly put to the sword, in all parts of Europe by Christian Kings, illustrious followers of the Lamb, and lucid witnesses to the bloodless triumph of His Cross. Again, the same vanity and fanatical self-assertiveness made the Christians of the Middle Ages completely blind to every type of goodness differing from the conventional sanctity of their clique. Patriotism, commercial in-

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Bellarmine in his *De Arte Rene Moriendi* (Ed. Ferrare 1860, p. 261) relates that when the holy virgin St. Opportuna was on her death-bed, the Devil appeared to her in the form of a very black Ethiopian. His beard was distilling melted pitch; his eyes were like red-hot iron as it comes shining with many sparks from the furnace; and out of his mouth and his nose issued flame and sulphur vapour.



tegrity, and the faithful discharge of domestic and social duties, were as nothing to their eyes when compared with wearing hair shirts, or declining matrimonial obligations. This belief in having a divinely protected monopoly of wisdom and virtue, led of necessity to the spirit of persecution. Those who held that God had long been in the habit of vindicating his saints by miraculously punishing their enemies, soon came to the conclusion that they themselves should assist the divine purposes by exterminating all those who opposed the faith and practice of the saints. Taken in this way, religious persecution appeared a perfectly justifiable measure altogether analogous with the means employed by rulers of States towards persons whose principles and conduct are against the common welfare. Indeed the horrors of the Inquisition follow so logically from the teaching of the Church about the deadliness of unbelief, and the duty of uprooting it, that Dominic and Torquemada almost appear to have been less odious as Sadistic monsters, than pitiable as victims of a vile creed.

Writing in a Freethought weekly on July 8, 1905, I directed the attention of the Lord Bishop of London to the above features of the time *When It Was Dark*, not in the imagination of a clap-trap novelist, but in the real course of history; and then went on to say:—

The Bishop applauds the prescience which discerns calamities in the universal rejection of Christianity. Can it be that among these calamities he apprehends any more appalling than the perversion and debasement of the human mind which transpired during the universal acceptance of Christianity? It would be very interesting to know his answer to this question.

Alluding to the rumour about the Bishop's fatuous braggery of his exploits as an infidel-smasher in the Parks of the Metropolis, I remarked that some years had passed since his latest appearance in those leafy shades as a Christian protagonist, and commented upon this fact as follows:—

Whether the story is on a par with the falsehoods invented in *When It Was Dark* or whether experience, the teacher, able to convey grave lessons of various sorts even to wealthy prelates, has convinced our mitred friend of the futility attending this mode of operation, we know not; the fact remains that he declines to stand up for Jesus in places where the lowly unbeliever could have a shy at him. "Courage," says Lord Macaulay, "is a quality never wanting in the English gentleman." We trust the Lord Bishop of London is no exception to the standard prevailing among the class wherein he claims membership, and if so, we doubt not that he could find on the staff of this journal—an organ that has never sold itself to vulgar aims—foemen not unworthy of his steel. There are unquestionably means whereby he can, if so disposed, evade a combat. Like the hero from beyond the seas,<sup>2</sup> he may plead the pressure of his employments. Like the venerable sage of Halle,<sup>3</sup> he may affect to sneer at the status of the journal which invokes him to the strife. Tactics of this sort might save him from a possible castigation; but we sincerely trust that they would be unavailing to still the remonstrances of his better mind.

C. CLAYTON DOVE

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Torrey the American Evangelist.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Loofs. These notes are now added.

## On Symbolism Again

### II.

IN the very interesting discussion between the ex-Abbé Loisey and Dr. Couchoud on the question of Jesus, Loisey claims that there was a real Jesus, a religious teacher, who after his death by crucifixion was raised to the level of a God by his followers; while Couchoud says that, in reality, it was the other way about. That is, the original story was a variation of the god-myths of the day, possibly based on solar myths and incorporating many pagan legends, and later editors brought the god from the skies and made a man of him. If this is so—and I am in agreement with Couchoud—there can be no further question about the historicity of Jesus. He just takes his place with the other Pagan Gods.

But what about his companions—what about the other personages in the Bible? How many of them had any real existence? We can put aside most of the old kings of Judah and Israel, for there is no reason to doubt them, though, as I have remarked more than once, I have never seen any evidence whatever to prove that David and Solomon ever lived. But we have a long line of Bible heroes and heroines like Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, Esther, Peter, Mary, about whom secular history is absolutely silent, and who would have remained quite unknown were it not for the Bible. Were they real people, or were they, like Jesus, just myths or symbols?

It is interesting to find the orthodox mind working on the problem of Abraham, for example. Canon Cheyne in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* has a long article on him, and one can sense that it is with unwilling grace he admits that Abraham is a myth or a symbol. He contends that the ancient traditions are just legends, and that it is certain "they are not historical records of the time which the family history appears to describe." And Cheyne, in varying language, says the same thing over and over again. He insists that the marriage between Abraham and Sarah may be taken "to symbolize the political fusion between a southron Israelitish tribe and non-Israelitish clans to the south of Hebron." And the union between Abraham and Hagar "may also have a political meaning."

As for Sarah, Cheyne is quite certain that she is no more a historical character than Abraham, but he seems to avoid, where he can, making any concession to those who hold, even partly, the Sun-myth theories, and who regard Sarah as being the natural Hebrew corruption of the word Astarte, or Istar, or Ashtoreth. Robert Taylor says the word Sarah means a Star, and that it is even found in the Egyptian *Sarah Apis*, that is, Serapis. Considering that the very orthodox Dr. Yahuda eloquently maintains that the Bible is true because of its close connexion with Egypt, Taylor may indeed be right. In fact, he goes further, because he claims that Sarah personifies the Universal Mother, "who is the Cybele, or Mother of the Gods of the Mythology, the Virgin Deipara, or God-bearer of the Zodiac, the Virgin Mary, or Christ bearer of the gospel, or the Wonder, or Woman in Heaven of the Apocalypse." And he adds, "The scriptural allegorist having allegorically buried Sarah in the allegorical cave of Machpelah he revives the self-same character again in the person of Rebekah, to be the wife of Isaac, with the self-same story of being his sister, as well as his wife, and her being exceeding handsome as Sarah had been, and Isaac selling her again to Abimelech, King of Gerah, just as Abraham had sold his Sarah to the same Abimelech, King of Gerah." Further similarities will also be found in the story of

Overhead, overhead,  
Rushes life in a race,  
And the clouds the clouds chase;  
And we go,  
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,  
Even we,  
Even so.

Meredith.



Jacob and Rachael. The point of all this is, simply, that these stories are just—stories; there is no history in them, and they were written to point out some symbolism. What *exactly* is that symbolism it may be very difficult to find out, though I wish to say that, as far as my study of the question has taken me, I am inclined more to agree with Robert Taylor than with Canon Cheyne. Political symbolism may have been intended, but I see a great deal connected with the story of the Sun as it progresses through the signs of the Zodiac. In any case, we have good scriptural authority for maintaining that some of the stories connected with Bible heroes are "allegories." Paul, in Galatians, distinctly declares that the story of Abraham and his two sons is an allegory. He even says that Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.

The celebrated 49th chapter of Genesis gives Jacob's blessings to his sons and their description; and if one reads it with a map of the Zodiac before him he will find each son is a sign accurately described. Not only that, but in the 37th chapter, Joseph describes his dreams, one of them being, "Behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me,"—surely a key to the astrological background of a good deal of Genesis.

There is a remarkable passage in Robert Taylor's *Lecture on Free-Masonry* of interest these days:—

The HEBREWS! Then who are, or were, or what is or what was meant by, the Hebrews? . . . The Hebrews, the Jewish nation, you have been taught to believe the descendants of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a national and political people such as the French, Dutch, Poles, Russians, among ourselves—a people that once had a political constitution. . . . But *where?* in what monument of past existence? in what document, line, word, or vestige of history? . . . have we a vestige of the existence of a Hebrew nation? That question can be answered only in the most decisive, the most unequivocal negation that ever truth threw up in solution of any inquiry whatever. NOWHERE in all the world, nowhere: in no era of time, in no slate, or stone, or skin, or papyrus, or paper—in nothing that ever was plastered by the trowel, scratched by the style, graven by the chisel, or written by the pen of the human hand, hath the world ever possessed a scratch or a scabblement that recognized the existence of a Hebrew nation. "A holy nation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood" their only scriptural definition is a definition that expressly bars off, and excludes, any sense of their ever having existed as a political body, or ordinary people, in the national sense.

Taylor does not actually deny that "there were persons or a community of persons, called the Hebrews," but he denies that they were a real nation; he claims that "the terms, Jews, Israelites, and Hebrews, were designations of those who passed on to the highest dignities" in religious mysteries of certain kinds. The Egyptian priesthood was certainly a body connected with "mysteries," which only members were allowed lawfully to take part; and there certainly were mysteries designated by the names of Eleusinian and Dionysian, just as there are "mysteries" connected with Freemasonry these days—and which are just as futile. And as soon as one delves deeper into religion and begins to ask questions, he is pulled up by these or similar mysteries "which it is not lawful to utter." The Jews were actually forbidden to utter the name of their God, and even now are obliged to substitute the name of Adonis (pronounced Adonai) for him.

But if one grants that at least some of the Old Testament characters are purely symbolical, what about those of the New? Mary can be dismissed at once; it seems incredible that anyone can see in her anything but a re-hash of the Pagan goddesses. What about Peter?

Let us give credit to the writers or editors who have invested Peter with life—or rather, who have so described him, that, like my favourite character, Mr. Pickwick, he is "drawn to the life." But did he ever have a real existence? He is introduced to us for the first time in Matthew without any idea that it was the first time. We are supposed to know him. Yet why is he called Simon Peter? Why Simon Bar-Jonah? Why Cephas, or a Rock?

Whether "the rock that begat thee" in Deuteronomy is a figure of speech, or whether it has a hidden phallic meaning, is a question still hotly disputed. But a good case can be made for the phallic meaning, and the consonants in the name Simon are used in an English word directly concerned with generation. Taylor says flatly that Peter is really a personification of the Aquarius of the Zodiac—identifying him with the Jonah of the Old Testament—"in the New Covenant, it is the man that catches the fish; whereas, in the Old Covenant, it is the fish that catches the man." He insists that Peter must be Janus, the old Roman deity, from whom we get the word January. But while nobody has produced a line to show outside the New Testament that Peter ever lived, yet "Rome to this day retains Janus, under his name Peter, as her patron saint; and her temple of Janus, on the self-same spot of ground, under the name of St. Peter's Church."

Peter is almost always represented in art carrying a staff in one hand, and a key in the other, just like Janus; and they are both often represented also with two faces. And there are many more striking analogies which space forbids me to describe more fully. Peter's fellow apostles can also, like Jacob's sons, be shown to be endowed with many of the characteristics of the other signs of the Zodiac (Matthew, for instance, is almost always accompanied in art with a bull—the Bull of the Zodiac, or Taurus); but enough has been said to show how symbolism in some form permeates the Bible. There is in that work, as Origen always claimed, for those who know, a hidden meaning. For Freethinkers, however, one is bound to say that both the esoteric and the exoteric meanings seem to be often utterly futile and fatuous.

H. CUTNER

## Youthful Estimates

SEEK and ye shall find, if not what you lack, probably something more important. Recently when looking for a book, an old edition of Shakespeare, which aroused many memories, unexpectedly turned up. One of these memories tells how Shakespeare came to me. Reading, while sauntering along a country lane I forgathered with an ancient-looking postman who asked—"An' what might you be readin'?" "*The Scottish Chiefs*," said I. "Thraw the buik owre the hedge," said he, "An' start readin' Shakespeare, we've had mair than enuch o' they Chiefs." I didn't "thraw the buik owre the hedge," books being too valuable in the hill country, but I got a John Dicks' Shakespeare—the date of purchase recorded on it is 1878! Complete, unabridged editions of the classics could be had from John Dicks (London) at 1s. each, and numberless interesting plays at one penny each. John Dicks was a great poor man's publisher.

Shakespeare came into my hitherto unilluminated life like the rising of a brilliant intellectual sun. He was eagerly read, and, to me, all the noteworthy passages marked—466 of them—the use made of these I will speak of later. Since finding this old edition I have re-read it to note my youthful selection. Some



of the passages I would not have marked to-day, and there are others which I would have marked. But these passages balance so fairly that the total, and its analysis, remains unaffected.

To many, a critical faculty is thought requisite before any such selection may be made. At twelve years of age, and for many years after, I had no critical ability. Amiel, in his *Journal Intime*, makes much of critical ability. On October 19, 1869, he writes—"What years of labour, what study and comparison, are needed to bring the critical judgment to maturity." But one may have a natural intellectual relish or discernment—a taste—for good literature and be satisfied with the pleasure derived from it. Whilst another, by years of labour, may attain such proficiency as a critic, as to be said to have a genius for criticism. The difference between these two being that whereas the first may have taste without genius, the second cannot have genius without taste. And Amiel would probably agree with me that one may have taste and no critical judgment. It is better surely to be empowered by good taste to feel the beauty and greatness of passages in literature, than by analysis and critical judgment to intellectually demonstrate why they are great without feeling them to be so. For instance: a literary man once lectured for over an hour on the function of vowel sounds, consonantal chords, rhythm, etc., in good literature. And during the debate which followed he said that his favourite poet was "Pope"! Analysis and years of study had produced this result. Why? Had his critical judgment become mature? Amiel probably explains why! On May 19, 1878, he writes—"Criticism is above all a gift, an intuition, a matter of tact and *flair*; it cannot be taught or demonstrated—it is an art." Byron says the same, rather differently:—

A man must serve his time to every trade save censure—critics all are ready-made.

Now criticism being the art of examining critically into the merits or demerits of any work, how can it be said to be either *ready-made* or *a gift*, when, as our philosopher has already admitted, years of labour and study are needed to bring the critical judgment to maturity? A clever critic may have a special aptitude, but even so it needs developing by training and study. But taste can be legitimately said to be a gift.

From the age of twelve, and onward, during my school years, Shakespeare was read, and what seemed noteworthy passages marked. My idea then being that the greatness of any book was determined by the number of good passages it contained; that Shakespeare used story only as a strap on which to string his pearls. To apply this idea to the Tragedies, Comedies, etc., individually and collectively to test it, I have placed the number of quotations opposite each:—

TRAGEDIES		COMEDIES	
Hamlet	63	The Tempest	22
Macbeth	28	Much Ado About	
King Lear	24	Nothing	19
Othello	23	Measure for Measure	18
9 Others	72	Love's Labour Lost	16
	210	10 Others	95
			170
HISTORICAL		POEMS	
Henry V.	10	Sonnets	18
Richard II.	9	5 Others	16
Henry VIII.	9		
2nd Henry IV.	8		34
6 Others	16		
	52		

On the face of it there seems something to be said for this primitive way of estimating values. The Tragedies, collectively considered, are placed first, the Comedies second, and the Historical plays third. And who can question the rightness of this? Individually the Tragedies work out fairly well. The *Tempest* may be correctly placed, but the others will be questioned. Where it may be asked is *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*? The first only receives 9, the second 11, and the third 11. But according to your choice be it unto you, if the play and mere pleasure is the thing, this allotment will be objected to.

The only other books we had in those days were the Bible, Byron, Shelley, and *The Life Drama*, by Alexander Smith. This test applied to them gave the following results:—

The Bible 164. Byron 114 (*Don Juan* 56, *Child Harold* 26, Other Poems 32. Shelley 29. *Life Drama* 134.

Of the latter: The Bible quotations were all beyond doubt, for instance:—

"Be ye quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." Byron works out splendidly. And Shelley, however great he may be in many ways, said very few sensible things.

*The Life Drama* carried me away like a quick flowing stream. Few plays, if any, begin like it:—

As a wild maiden with love-drinking eyes, sees in sweet dreams a beaming Youth of Glory, and wakes to weep. . . .

What a rich play! With double the quotations of *Hamlet*, yet not so great as *Hamlet*!

Metaphorically, and otherwise, full of good things—"I speared him with a jest"; "My drooping sails flap idly 'gainst the mast of my intent"; "When one has a big heart and feeble hands," etc. Poets all have uninspired moments which they foolishly try to make use of, sometimes with disastrous results. Readers of the *Life Drama* will remember a few, but even these add to its interest like Jimmy Thomson's "O Sophonisba, O!"

The marked passages used I should have intimated earlier were all brief, a few lines, often one only. May I say in conclusion that I have no thought of patenting this critical method!

GEORGE WALLACE

## The Taper of Reason

SMITH: "Was not the recent scare in the United States surprising? Fancy the peoples there being so credulous as to believe that their country had been invaded by an army of warriors from Mars!"

Robinson: "The incident did not surprise me. Large masses of the people in all parts of the globe have, from their infancy, been so impregnated with superstition that they will credit *anything* which savours of the supernatural. The more impossible the alleged event the greedier they are to devour it."

S.: "But an invasion from Mars! The idea is so ludicrous that it is difficult to understand how apparently sane people could have given the slightest credence to it."

R.: "If apparently sane people find no difficulty in believing such nonsense as the biblical tales of the Creation, the talking snake, Noah's Ark and others quite as fantastic, why should they not believe in the possibility of an invasion of this planet by the inhabitants of Mars? Such an event is quite as feasible as many of those recorded in the Bible."

S.: "While admitting that there is much truth in



what you say, I maintain that with the knowledge the people now possess they ought to be proof against believing that such an occurrence as an invasion from Mars is even remotely possible."

R.: "The possession of what you call knowledge places little restraint upon the pathetic credulity of masses of the people. At the best their knowledge is merely superficial. As you know thousands, if not millions of apparently sane people believe implicitly in the rubbish disseminated in certain newspapers by people calling themselves astrologers. Others believe in ghosts, evil spirits, grotesque local superstitions, and some I know—all apparently sane people—have not completely discarded such belief. I have no doubt that if Mr. Lloyd George at the peak of his well-merited popularity in 1918, had announced that during the Great War he had been in direct communication with God, from whom he had received certain instructions which he had duly carried out, and had thus secured victory for the Allies, scores of thousands of apparently sane people would have treated his assurance as gospel. Furthermore, if he had asserted that God had specially selected him as his medium for establishing a reformed religion, and had given him specific instructions how to act, and that he was carrying out these alleged orders, a new, and perhaps a powerful religion, would have been established claiming scores of thousands of apparently sane adherents. Similarly, if Hitler, like Mahomet, were to assume the rôle of a prophet, millions of apparently sane Germans would put their trust in him, and be prepared to make any personal sacrifice on behalf of their newly acquired faith, even to the extent of undergoing martyrdom."

S.: "I admit that the vast majority of the people are very credulous. How is it possible to eradicate this evil?"

R.: "Being fostered by religion, and encountering no discouragement in the elementary schools, the task of elimination is a difficult one. However, with the increasing facilities for a higher education, and the activities of the Secular Societies, whose main object is the diffusion of useful knowledge, it is not unreasonable to expect a marked improvement in the not distant future. Although encountering many serious obstacles Truth has a happy knack of eventually surmounting them."

PRO REASON

#### HEREDITARY KINGSHIP

No finer illustration of the absurdity of hereditary kingship could be found than is supplied by one consequence of the death of the King of Irak. His son is three years of age, and is at once King on the death of his father. But this means that for some fifteen years he must remain a mere puppet in the hands of older men. He can obviously take no part in the Government of the country, and his mind will be dominated and fashioned by those who have charge of his education. But until he arrives at a certain age he can have no more to do with the government of the country than if he had been born in the backwoods of Australia. But if Irak can manage without the possible help or interference of the King for about fifteen years, why cannot it do without the hereditary principle altogether? If certain men can be trusted to look after the King during his period of immaturity, why cannot they look after the country without there being an hereditary monarch waiting actively to fill the post? There was some reason for an hereditary monarch when the tribal god was duly incarnated in the son of the dead King, but, under modern conditions, to entrust the country to certain men for half a generation and finally to say that the country will suffer if an hereditary monarch is not then placed in power, is one of those glaring absurdities that make one almost despair of human reason.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON

#### INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.0, Dr. Marie Jahoda—"Austria, 1918-1938."

#### OUTDOOR

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place) : 7.30, Mr. J. W. Barker.

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

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park) : 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Bryant, Barnes, Collins and Mrs N. Buxton. Weather permitting.

### COUNTRY

#### INDOOR

TEES SIDE BRANCH N.S.S. Jubilee Hall, Leeds Street) : 7.15, A Lecture.

#### OUTDOOR

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (The Mound) : 7.0, Mr. Frank Smithies—"Fossil Gods."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Eccles Market) : 8.0, Friday, Bury Market, 8.0, Saturday. Stevenson Square, 7.0, Sunday. Mr. W. A. Atkinson will speak at these meetings.

NEWCASTLE (Bigg Market) : 8.0, Friday, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"The After Life and Before."

STOCKTON (Jubilee Hall) : 7.15, Sunday, Mr. Roysha Mohamed and Mr. J. T. Brighton.

CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE.—Miss MARJORIE BOWEN will deliver the Thirtieth Lecture, entitled "Ethics in Modern Art," at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1, on Wednesday, April 19. Chair to be taken by Dr. Herbert Read, M.A., at 7 p.m. Admission free. Reserved seats 1s. Tickets to be obtained from Conway Hall.

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The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of enquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularization of the State, etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

The liability of members is limited to £1, in case the Society should ever be wound up.

All who join the Society participate in the control of its business and the trusteeship of its resources. It is expressly provided in the Articles of Association that no member, as such, shall derive any sort of profit from the Society, either by way of dividend, bonus, or interest.

The Society's affairs are managed by an elected Board of Directors, one-third of whom retire (by ballot), each year, but are eligible for re-election.

Friends desiring to benefit the Society are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favour in their wills. The now historic decision of the House of Lords in *re Bowman and Others v. the Secular Society Limited*, in 1917, a verbatim report of which may be obtained from its publishers, the Pioneer Press, or from the Secretary, makes it quite impossible to set aside such bequests.

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