

# THE FREETHINKER

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Views and Opinions

Secularize the Army!

DURING the past century the secularization of life has gone on apace. That has been the striking feature of the past four hundred years. The Protestant Reformation, which Roman Catholics represented as the work of the Devil and Protestants as due to man's hunger for the Bible, took a very distinct step in the direction of the secularization of politics. It was not the beginning of this, because under Roman Catholicism the theoretical distinction between the religious and the secular power had always, in Christian times, existed. It is not, indeed, usually noted that there was no State Church before Protestant times. The Roman Catholic Church would never admit, and does not admit now, that it can be a department of the State. What the Church aimed at was to make the State a department of the Church. Laws compelling a profession of Christianity began with Protestantism. It is because of the attitude and claims of the Church just noted that one meets in English law, for example, with such a clear distinction between the secular and the ecclesiastical courts. The Roman Church claimed, and still claims, control over morals and religion; leaving the State to deal with offences against the person and property, against the crown, and so forth. But so far as my researches can inform me there was no law in anti-Protestant times which compelled a man to go to Church or to make a profession of Christianity. A State Church, that mixture of greed, falsehood and intolerance, we owe to Protestantism. The state of things described also permitted modern Roman Catholic apologists, true descendants of the lusty religious liars of earlier times, to plead that the Roman Church did not put people to death for heresy. The Roman Church did not because it could not. But it had methods of inducing the secular rulers to carry out its will that heretics should be put to death, and good religious grounds for demanding that it should be done. That the secular prince or overlord, as such, could protect his people from the Church does not

mean that he did so. These overlords were also children of the Church, and what they might do as overlords they dare not do as good Christians.

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Religion in the Army

But the secularization of life has been proceeding. In this country Common Civil Rights belong to all, irrespective of any religion or non-religion. With the loss of power of the Ecclesiastical Courts blasphemy—there was never any law against Atheism in this country—from being a crime against God has sunk to the level of a row outside a beershop. The essence of the modern reading of blasphemy is simply that of creating a breach of the peace. If it is not likely—in the opinion of Christians—to result in a breach of the peace, there is really no offence. Jews have been allowed to sit in Parliament for over a century, and professed Atheists may also sit, and if they decline to take a religious oath when they enter Parliament no religious member will object or be shocked. He will probably think that a little more sincerity will not be out of place. Any man in this country may profess any religion he pleases, or go without altogether, without losing his legal rights, or suffering any legal punishment. Social discomfort, business boycott, are other things. The only exception to this free choice of religion is that of the monarch. That is inevitable, since he is, theoretically, an incarnation of the national Joss, and in any case his religion was selected for him generations before he was born.

Next to the Church (in some respects *more* than the Church for self-interest forces the Church to pay some attention to public opinion) for sheer conservatism comes the army. It is not too much to say that most reforms in army life, and even in the art of war, have been forced upon military authorities by civilians. It was a civilian, a Polish banker, who nearly twenty years before the "Great" War demonstrated—to laymen—that the next war would be one of trenches. But that warning affected but little the military mind. Even in the use of barbed wire it was the Boer farmers who showed militarists what use could be made of it. The conclusion that if barbed wire was good for keeping cattle in it might be useful for keeping soldiers out, was too unusual for the military mind to assimilate. The relation between officers and men in an army to-day is still like that which existed between the noble and his serf—good-natured and kindly when the officer is a decent sort of a man, but never permitting anything like familiarity, or an advance in intimacy beyond a given clearly defined point.

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The Army and Justice

Now among the legal rights of every British citizen to-day—it is an example of the secularization of life—is that of publicly professing any religion he or she

pleases, or when a statement is necessary, professing Atheism, Agnosticism, or any other non-religious 'ism without penalty, and also of substituting an affirmation in any or every case where in the usual way a religious oath is required. But somehow or other these things are not yet common to the military mind. It is true that the Oaths Amendment Act, which made this provision for substituting an affirmation for the oath, was only passed in 1888, and one must not expect all military officers to be familiar with so recent a piece of legislation. But since we have been living in an atmosphere filled with talk of one crisis after another, we have received numerous complaints from young men "joining up" that the recruiting officer before whom they have gone has insisted upon a profession of some religion or other. Letters have also appeared in the press voicing the same complaint; that is, some of them have complained. Others have thought it right and proper.

It appears that the form which has to be filled up by every recruit has upon it a place marked "Religion." If the recruit happens not to have a religion and is honest enough to say so, the officer in charge usually meets him with a "You must have some religion." Again comes the protest, "I have none," or "I am an Atheist," or a Freethinker, or an Agnostic. "But," replies the officer, "there is a place here for religion, and therefore it must be filled. What was your father?" "A Baptist." "Well, we will enter you as a Baptist." "But I am not a Baptist." "Oh, we will put you down as Church of England," and by this time the recruit, standing a little in awe of the officer, and being a little fearful of offending a military official, lets it go at that.

Now all this is decidedly wrong. More than that, it is, if not illegal in one sense, against the law as it stands, and the recruit commences his career as a soldier by an act which robs him of his right as a British citizen, and the officer gives him the first lesson he gets in the army, which is that orders must be obeyed, even though they are not in accordance with what is morally and legally correct.

For it does not matter to the value of a brass button what is on the form, or what the officer says. Every man joining the army, whether as a conscript or as a volunteer, has the full legal right to have his position as regards religion set down as he states it. Whether he calls himself a Baptist, or Roman Catholic, a worshipper of Mumbo-Jumbo, an Atheist, or anything else, he may and should insist upon his attestation on that point being entered exactly as he gives it, and if that is not done he should refuse to sign anything.

The same holds good of the affirmation. There is absolutely no exception to the right of anyone to affirm, instead of taking an oath, wherever and whenever an attestation of any kind is required. The Oaths Amendment Act is clear and explicit on this point. And it is a right that will be upheld by any court in the country. It is a bad beginning for a man who joins the army in order, as he is told, to uphold the principle of freedom, to be forced into commencing his career by giving his assent to a lie, making a false statement at the order of a military officer.

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#### A Parson to the Rescue

I admit that this falsehood is not objected to by most religious people. Here, for example, is a letter from a clergyman, a Mr. J. Vivian Thomas, of Langton, Wragby, who defends this act of compulsory perjury by saying:

When men enlist they are asked, "What religion?" They are then free to attend whatever church parade they profess to belong to. This is no real hardship. To pretend to belong to a Church and then refuse to

attend it, is nothing but humbugging hypocrisy which very rightly the army does not encourage.

That is a characteristic piece of Christian dishonesty. The recruit who complains afterwards did not himself say he was a Baptist, a Methodist, or a member of the Church of England. In the cases of which complaint is made the recruit was forced by the military official to write down *some* religion, and from his own ignorance of the law, and also because being what he was he could not conceive any man having the audacity to refuse to obey an army regulation—even though in its application that regulation was what lawyers would call *ultra vires*. The recruits who have written me, and who have complained to others, did not select a religion, it was selected for them. They were made to sign a false statement, and this pettifogging little parson then turns on him and says he is a "humbugging hypocrite" (I cannot for the life of me see how he can be a humbug and a hypocrite at the same time) because he protests against being forced to sign a declaration that was untrue.

Mr. Thomas adds, "it is high time that the churches refused to marry or bury civilians, who expect the consolations of religion without its obligations." That is the one statement Mr. Thomas makes that we endorse, and that, if we mistake not, is animated by spite, not by a love of justice. For, after all, it is not the non-believer who wishes a parson to either marry him or bury him. It is the parsonry which pleads to marry him, and rushes to bury him. Even when he is right a clergyman finds it hard to be right without showing vindictiveness.

Compulsory Church attendance is one of those army institutions which I believe goes against the grain of fifty per cent of the army. Is there any reason for things continuing as they are? I raise no complaint against any soldier attending Church who wishes to do so. But I do, and have probably half the army with me in saying it, protest that it is time this compulsory attendance at church was abolished. Is there any reason why a soldier should be marched to Church, whether he wishes to go there or not? Is it not enough to be dressed by order, shaved by order, put to bed by order, and wakened by order, that he must have added to it, being sent to church by order? Is it necessary to rob the soldier of that elementary freedom which is the birthright of every British citizen? Why, while we are about it, should the soldier be so carefully guarded with regard to this matter, although being in the army is a bar to the complete rights of free citizenship?

I know quite well that some one may tell me that if a soldier does not wish to be marched to Church—ninety per cent of them would much rather march to a "sing-song"—he may be excused if he applies to the proper person. Quite so, but that merely adds to the hypocrisy of the situation. Everyone knows that to express a wish to stay away from Church, and thus exercise the choice of every British citizen—bar soldiers—is to expose oneself to what is substantially punishment. It means being allotted the most unpleasant task that can be found, and usually to have less leisure time than those who have gone through the pious performance. I hope to be able shortly to see if the War Office cannot be induced to issue orders to recruiting officers as to the oath and the registration of the recruit's declared religious beliefs. Meanwhile I advise all who are entering the army, and are not religious, to insist on having their statements put down exactly as they make them, to decline the religious oath, to insist on the affirmation, and to sign nothing until their rights in this matter are respected. They will then be not only vindicating their own rights, they will make them the more certain for other people.

CHAPMAN COHEN

## Apocryphal Angels

There is no darkness but ignorance.—*Shakespeare*.  
You do not believe, you only believe that you believe.  
*Coleridge*.

It is a generation since the legendary "angels" of Mons provided a nine-days' wonder. Since that time the alleged celestial visitors have received less attention than the latest scandal. It almost seems as if this Christian generation has lost its simplicity and innocence of faith, in spite of the kindly professional efforts of tens of thousands of clergymen. Yet the quaint notion of heavenly visitation does survive. "Angels' visits are few and far between," says the popular and untruthful proverb. They came in shoals in parish magazines, religious publications, on cinema films and picture postcards, in cheap lithographs, and in Spiritualist journals.

Yet the naughty artists have all along created angels. Just as Albert Durer painted his own portrait, and started the conventional portraiture of the alleged founder of Christianity, so other artists gave us our angels. In the old Saxon manuscripts the dear angels are dressed in shirt and undershirt in the somewhat simple fashion of that period. With Perugini, Luini, and Raffaele died the old, simple, and ascetic angelhood. The more modern varieties are much more elegant creations, and the latest pictorial efforts resemble nothing so much as the charming ladies of the musical comedy chorus.

From the iconography, the written or drawn images of angels, to their osteology, is but a step, but it is the one narrow step which is said to divide the sublime from the ridiculous. Faithful Christians would be well advised to let the bony structures of angels alone. With Michel Angelo, George F. Watts, and other artists, the skeleton might be left to take its chance under very ample and beautifully coloured draperies. The point of juncture of the wings with the body of an angel has always caused artists fever of the brow—as well it might. Concerning the articulations necessary for a six-winged angel, like the handsome creature figured on a stained-glass window at Merton College, Oxford, the least said the soonest mended. Such discussion is mere word-spinning, more or less resembling Charles Lamb's jocular question to the pious Coleridge as to how many angels could dance on the point of a needle. The fact emerges that the Christian theologians borrowed their angels with so much else of their composite religion. Christian art is not entirely to blame for angelic construction. Some of the responsibility for the iconography of the angel must be thrown on the Ancient Greeks, who, according to their own imperishable works, possess backs broad enough for the artistic burden. At least it may be said that the "winged victory" of the old Greeks is, unquestionably, more sublime and impressive than any pretty feathered creature of the later Christian imagination.

But the legend of the angels seen by soldiers at Mons in the Great War belongs to a very different category. In this instance it is simply a fresh example of lying for the glory of God. It will provide for posterity a psychological speculation of the value of the exploitation of mass hysteria. The legend itself may be revived, but it can never take its place with such historic examples as those of the Flying Dutchman or the Wandering Jew. The true interest of the Mons legend must always remain psychological rather than historical. It offers a very striking example in the twentieth century of the origin and growth of a legend, and it throws a searchlight on the origin of similar myths that have developed in the re-

mote past out of the terrors, anxieties, and hopes of ignorant people, whose fears have been exploited to the full by a tyrannical Priestcraft. The historic myths and legends of the priests could only have originated and survived in circumstances of the grossest ignorance on the part of the people themselves. Now that Free-thinkers can bring the clergy to the challenge of definite proof the case is entirely altered. For the true twilight of the gods came with the Freethought Movement. Newspapers far too often pander to the clergy, but there is always the chance that newspaper editors may at last return to a sense of dignity and responsibility. That may be too much to hope of the pulpit, for the clergy are so irresponsible, and there is great difficulty in proving that any given statement has been made orally. In newspapers it is in print, and that fastens the responsibility.

It is a little difficult to keep out the note of contempt concerning angels, for priests are so persistent in their propaganda. The sea-front at Nice, for example, is described as the "Bay of the Angels," and is supposed to have been associated with a paltry religious legend. Nice is one of the loveliest spots in all Europe, probably in all the world. For scores of centuries it has excited the admiration of all onlookers. It enticed the aristocrats of old-world Rome just as readily as the cosmopolitan rich of the modern world. It is the acknowledged beauty-spot of the Riviera, the loveliest of the gems that sparkle in the diadem of the Mediterranean Sea. Such a place owes nothing to the lies at the lips of the priests, for its loveliness was acknowledged before there was any Christian Superstition, and its beauty will persist when Christianity is forgotten. Angels, indeed! As if any feathered human imagining could add to the sun-kissed beauty of this paragon among cities:—

Match me such marvel, save in Eastern clime  
A rose-clad city, half as old as time.

There is an undercurrent of humour at all this mass hysteria concerning celestial hocus-pocus and visitation. It has the quality of true comedy of being only one remove from pathos. The jitters of the Neapolitan congregation at the fraudulent liquefaction of the blood of Saint Januarius in no way differs from the hysteria at the faked exhibition of the Holy Fire at Jerusalem. It could happen here in England. Something of the kind may be seen at so-called faith-healing services. An extra twist or so on the part of the officiating charlatans and mass hysteria would be brought gibbering to the surface. Protestant, Roman, and Greek congregations are all seen to be tarred with the same brush of superstition.

Newspapers print miles of delirious writing concerning the Easter congregations at the fake of the Holy Fire at Jerusalem. The church crowded to suffocation, with soldiers to keep order among the hysterical worshippers. They describe the crescendo of frenzy when the light appears in the darkened church, the holy fire enkindled from heaven. Who, however, points to the priestly figure skulking in the shadows with a box of matches?

There is nothing supernatural in all this holy hocus-pocus and abracadabra. The too obvious pettiness and prettiness of the angelic host are but half of the sorry story. The other side of the medal is the record of demonology, something at which the Christian world grew pale with fear. All antiquity was cruel, but the immense butcheries of the weakest of the weak sex in the name of witchcraft has badly smirched the Christian Church for ever. Happily, the darkness of ignorance is now passing, with its angels and devils, its hells, purgatories and paradises.

## Seekers after Pleasure

RETURNING from an evening stroll, I passed a man in the street carrying four large posters, one of which warned the ungodly of the awful fate that awaited "the seekers after pleasure," at the end of their life's journey. The same morning I had a letter from a near relative, living in that part of the globe we speak of as "down under," conveying the sad intelligence that she had lost her husband, and was left to face the unknown future alone. She spoke of the many hours she sat listening-in to the wireless, and what a blessing it had proved in helping her to pass the time and relieve the monotony of her widowed loneliness. She added: I have been to church to-day, and the minister in his sermon called the wireless all the vile names he could think of, as being an instrument of the devil to lure people away from attendance at church.

These are trivial incidents, but they serve to show what has always been the Christian attitude towards the innocent pleasures of life. The scribe who put it on record that "Jesus wept," struck the keynote of the morbid character of Christianity. It is nowhere said that Jesus ever smiled, or laughed. He is described as a "Man of Sorrows," acquainted with grief. In pictorial art He is depicted with a crown of thorns on His forehead, and great drops of blood oozing from the wounds; portraying one of the most pitiable and ghastly spectacles imaginable. With these melancholy features as a background, the diseased view of human nature that Christianity introduced into the world, and which has acted like a nightmare upon the thoughts and lives of Western peoples for centuries, is one from which they are happily beginning to free themselves.

The fundamental error of the Church lay in refusing to recognize one of the most powerful instincts of our nature—the need, in the midst of life's turmoil, for some form of recreative pleasure and enjoyment, as a stimulant to the mind no less than to the body. We have a saying: All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy; and it expresses a universal truth. The Russian may skate 100 miles up a frozen river; other nationals may climb high mountains, and others voyage round the world; but whatever form a person's hobby may take, it is the outcome of the same universal desire. In contrast to the false ideas of Christian asceticism may be placed a picture of the Roman populace in holiday mood. One authority says that the Roman worker for the fraction of a penny could spend an hour in princely baths, such as the world no longer builds; the Great Circus, holding 380,000, allowed him, for more than a hundred days a year, to enjoy, from morning until night, without payment, the finest chariot races and the rarest entertainments that the world of his time afforded. Then there were the theatres, equally free, where the worker rocked with laughter at the antics of the mimes and mummers. After the nightmare of nineteen centuries we have partially awakened to the fact that playing grounds and open spaces are essential to the healthy development of child life. Of course, there have been occasions when the Christian recognized the worldly point of view as, for instance, when the country parson followed the hounds and went fox-hunting with the squire; or when my Lord Bishop went for a month's holiday on the continent for the purpose of refreshing his energies after such arduous tasks as writing letters for some parochial magazine, etc.

But the children of the poor; Still the Christian world refuses them their birth-right. I learn from a Sunday paper: Country outings for poor children in

South London are being frowned upon by Church and Roman Catholic schools—if the outings are planned on Sunday. One organizer who has already sent a thousand children for a day by the sea, said he was amazed at the opposition he had met with at certain schools. He need not have been, if he had been acquainted with the historic Christian attitude to all forms of "worldly" pleasures. The headmaster of St. Patrick's School, in Southwark, said that it was utterly out of the question that the children should miss Mass on Sunday. The health and enjoyment of the children which such an outing would bestow, were counted as nothing—they were merely pawns in the clerical game of keeping the children in their clutches. But opposition or no opposition, the Progressive Rambling Club, in co-operation with other organizations, is hoping on Sunday, September 17 to send away 1,000 children from Holborn, Shoreditch, Stepney, and other Central London areas, to Thorpe Bay. Apart from clerical and parental influence, if these 1,000 children had the choice of going to Mass, or spending a day at the sea-side, I fancy the voting would be 100 per cent for the sea.

The recreative impulse is one of the strongest in human nature, evidence of its irrepressibility, in child and adult alike, being found in every part of the globe. But no such claim can be made for religion. The fact that there are millions of people who have discarded religion, is sufficient to show that it is an imposition foisted on the ignorance of the ages of superstition. The Church's anxiety to inoculate the children with the religious virus when they are young; and the use of so many secular agencies of a social character to keep them within the pale of religious influences, all go to show that it is not part of our common human nature.

JOSEPH BRYCE

## The Clerk of the Weather

It is God, of course, who sees to the weather. "The Clerk of the Weather" is one of those "blessed" expressions which have fallen into common use in order to avoid the word "God," which the average Englishman feels it is bad form to use in conversation. Although the term is "one step removed" in the popular imagination, it is not so to the true-blue theologian. The Weather to him is undoubtedly "God's." Whether God alters the weather from moment to moment in accordance with the volume of prayer reaching the Throne, or whether he fixed it when, "after an eternity of idleness," he set the old ball revolving four thousand and four years before Christ at nine o'clock in the morning, *God fixes our weather*. He is responsible for our happiness or unhappiness on August Bank Holiday; encourages or discourages the growth of the seedling which may mean life or death to us; sends rain in floods, moderation, or not at all; parches us or drenches us as he pleases. The prayers of a righteous man avail much, but even after an orgy of prayer on the eve of Bank Holiday the most righteous of men gives a look to the clouds before he sets forth on the day of St. Lubbok, and if the clouds look unpromising he does not forget his raincoat.

Meteorology has galloped apace during the last generation. Attempts to forecast the weather fifty years ago were, in the main, unscientific; it was a general opinion that such attempts savoured more of magic than science, and the attempts of the prophets were scoffed at by all, and were the source of much humour. When Slim Jim in *The Yankee at the Court of King Arthur* discomfited Merlin, and had

him at his mercy, he was far from harsh with the old magician, but gave him what he termed, with his tongue in his cheek, "a minor branch" of magic to attend to. He allotted to him the job of prophesying the weather, and Mark Twain told us that in honesty he had to confess the old charlatan was no better and no worse than any other augur or soothsayer who had previously undertaken the job.

It is because Science finds so many "variables," and so few "constants" in meteorology that God as a Weather Wangler persists, as a belief, unto this day. God vanishes from the realms of all the sciences as they increase their territories; God as a hypothesis ceases to be necessary. But, as Man has not yet learned to control the elements, there is still a cave to which God can retire, and from which he cannot be so easily dislodged by the mop of science. Man has learnt to dispense with God, for instance, in sickness. He goes to the physician. It is when the doctor "gives him up" that he falls back upon God. "Have you heard that Smith's case is hopeless?" says one man to another. "Yes. God Help him," is the retort. Can man arrange a fine Bank Holiday? No! Then God help us.

Theology thrives in the unconquered realms of science. Prayers for Rain are still offered in Churches whenever the crops are threatened by drought. God will starve us, it is felt, unless we beg and solicit and praise. Our's is a fine God, our's is Satan may tremble but God rejoices when he sees "the weakest saint upon his knees." Until proud man ceases to stand erect the poor hungry millions will find their necessary food scorched into non-existence by the rays of God's Sunshine. But until men go down flop, close their eyes in helplessness, and utter words of praise, the sons of men and the daughters of men and the little children may starve. "Holy, Holy, Holy," from a hundred thousand fanes is what God likes to hear. It is what God *must* hear. God helps us *on terms*. It is necessary to be truly religious to run Holiness and Hooliganism in such admirable double harness.

Volume of prayer, we are assured by reputable divines, is the thing. It is volume, plus importunity, that influences God. That is the formula guaranteed by theological establishments. No one knows the percentage necessary to influence God sufficiently to turn on or off his deluge. We should say, judging from some instances we know, that it is a very high one. We heard Joseph Symes about forty years ago, at Bedlington in Northumberland, tell of a journey of his on horseback in the Australian Bush. The whole country had been suffering from one of God's droughts and the distress was huge, and the prayers were plentiful and importunate. As he was nearing a large lake God's rain descended, and Symes thought: At last, the long-hoped for rain! When he arrived at his destination he found that no rain had fallen there. He was to learn afterwards that no rain had fallen to be of use *anywhere*. God had so diverted the rain clouds so that the entire liberal shower had dropped into a spot where water already was. Here is a plain case of the volume of prayer affecting not the volume of rain, but its location. It is the way God says to his specially called servants (God's pick of the population): Here, you there! Get a move on with those people; More of them on their knees, please, and be quick about it. Otherwise the contents of the next cloud will continue to fall into a lake, or the sea, until you have sense to gather my meaning. If you don't want to see your children wasting and drooping and dying, on your knees with you and quick! And let us have more community singing:—

That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so that in due

time we may enjoy them

*We beseech thee to hear us good Lord.*

God wants you to *beseech*. It induces a glow just as it gives a glow to a tenth-rate man who can give or withhold his "benefactions." He wants recognition, this God, He who has acclaimed in his commandments to Man that he is a jealous God, and that none must on any account be put in front of him. He will be friendly only if we respect his egotism. He will be unfriendly if, instead of praying, we appoint men of science in our universities to see that "the kindly fruits of the earth may be preserved to our use so that in time we may enjoy them." If we do our best to circumvent God's little plans by manuring and irrigating the earth, and killing off his insects that he has furnished with appetites for the same kindly fruits, he will be wroth. If we study meteorology and base our plans accordingly, he will be furious. If we put our faith not in him, but in rain-coats, strong boots and umbrellas, his fury will endure for ever. For the God of our Archbishop of Canterbury, the God of our Pope of Rome, the God of Spurgeon's Tabernacle, is, mark you, a jealous God. He purrs only when he is beseeched. Otherwise he is far from amiable and has been known to scratch.

The rain cometh when God listeth and not to make an Englishman's Bank Holiday. He will stop our crops if it pleaseth him; it is the privilege of the *grand seigneur*. And if it should be his whim to kill our crops, we must still indulge in Thanksgiving. We must thank God for the crops we haven't got. In the tabernacles, we must sing the same old song:—

For all good gifts around us  
That come from heaven above  
Oh, praise the Lord  
Oh, praise the Lord  
For all his Love!

We'll call it LOVE, say the abject worshippers in the tabernacle, "It's safer." "That's the spirit," says He who sitteth high in the heavens and sends his Rain on the Just and the Unjust alike, he who sendeth drought when we require rain, and rain when we would be glad for a little sunshine. Pray, pray, pray! beseech, beseech, beseech! You may or you may not get what you want. But you have a good sporting chance. Whatever you get don't forget to thank me. And, for my sake, don't encourage these meteorologists. For if that type of boulder increases his boundaries (as he looks very much like doing), I'll be turned out of one of my snuggest caves and will have to find fresh shelter. And these God Resorts are becoming increasingly difficult to find. I have been hounded from one den to another, and each one draughtier and less comfortable than the last.

ATISHOO!

T. H. ELSTON

#### THE RIGHT TO REBEL.

The militarization of life that is going on in all parts of Europe is rapidly leading to the militarization of thought. The first law and the great law of militarism—whether it be defensive or offensive—is obedience to orders, and already the gospel is being preached that in the existing crisis the duty of the citizen is to follow the man at the top. And that teaching is almost as bad in times of war as it is in times of peace. A society that *cannot* revolt is a society in chains. A man who will not revolt is a slave in spirit. The possibility of rebellion is a thing upon which progress depends. It is infinitely better that men should revolt without cause than they should have cause for rebellion without courage to make their revolt manifest.

## Banal Beseechings

SMITH: "Have you noticed how persistent certain people are in claiming that Mr. Chamberlain's exploit in Munich was the direct result of prayer?"

Robinson: "Yes, and I have come to the conclusion that the vast majority of these people are adherents of the National Government. The claim does not appear to receive much support from its opponents."

S.: "Do you think it is a political stunt?"

R.: "Partly. You know what our politicians are capable of. In July I was spending a holiday in North Cornwall, where a by-election was being fought. At one of the meetings the Conservative candidate assured his supporters that the Munich peace was an answer to their prayers, and they appeared to accept without question his surety for the truth of the statement. On the other hand Mr. Lloyd George described the claim as a crude blasphemy, and the wife of the Liberal candidate told her audience that she was in Czechoslovakia during the crisis, and the Czechs were praying very hard. The churches were full, and crowds were unable to gain admittance. Pertinently she asked her listeners if they thought the Czechs' prayers were answered. In the correspondence columns of the local press somewhat similar views were freely expressed. One letter in particular attracted my attention. The writer, referring to the Conservative candidate's assurance to which I have alluded said: 'From that the obvious inference is this—the Almighty Father of us all was a partner in an action that was as base as it was cowardly by the handing over a brave, prosperous and peace-loving people, with all their wealth and natural resources to a cruel, mercenary neighbour, to save our own skins!'"

S.: "Good. It seems to me that Mr. Lloyd George would have been more correct if he had described the claim as pernicious nonsense emanating from either interested politicians or people accustomed to subordinate their reason to something which they describe glibly as faith."

R.: "Yes. Is it not strange that even the opponents of the National Government who profess to see clearly the absurdity of the Munich answer to prayer stunt yet fail to realize their own stupidity whenever they join in the Litany asking the good Lord to give to all nations unity, peace and concord, or as a matter of fact whenever they pray to him for anything?"

S.: "Strange, but true."

PRO REASON

## Let Us Not Cry

LET us not cry till Truth eternal brands  
All human hope as but a mocking wraith;  
Not though mankind's bereaved and frenzied hands  
Tear wide the painted panoply of Faith.  
Let us not cry—not you, nor I.

There have been tears enough to fertilize  
The seeming wastes of human destiny;  
Let us be brave. Silent the rolling skies,  
God is not weeping! Why then, dear, should we?  
Let us not cry—not you, nor I.

Reason brings stoic calm to dry our eyes;  
This is 'kerchief from Philosophy She borrows:  
"Nothing that once has lived, forever dies."  
Sail to-day's sea! For the uncharted morrow's  
Let us not cry—not you, nor I.  
Nothing that once has lived, can ever die.

WILLIAM MORGAN

## An Impossible Trial

THE gospel account of the trial of Jesus is a libel upon both Jewish and Roman Law. The Sanhedrim was composed of seventy-one members, chosen for their wisdom and uprightness. However great may have been their prejudices against Jesus, it is not possible that the whole body would have acted in defiance of their laws and customs; and this argument applies with still greater force to the Roman authorities, whose administration was guided and guarded by laws so wise and so strict that they still form the basis of the legislative system of all enlightened nations.

According to the story, the Jews tried, convicted, and sentenced Jesus in their own court, without reference to the Romans. He was not brought before Pilate until after the Sanhedrim had condemned him, which was illegal.

Again, he was examined before being tried, a proceeding expressly forbidden by Jewish law.

Again, he was tried at night, and the trial began and ended in one session, both circumstances being in direct opposition to law and custom.

Again, he was condemned and executed within two days, and the trial ended the day before the Sabbath, in both cases a defiance of the law.

Again, he was required to act as a witness against himself, also forbidden by Jewish law.

A Jew was never allowed to give testimony in his own case, and was never condemned upon his own confession.

Again, the judges acted as prosecutors, hunting up condemnatory evidence and securing false witnesses, conduct unheard of on the part of administrators of justice in any court, in any land.

Again, no opportunity was offered for the defence of the prisoner, an entirely unprecedented omission, the Jewish Law giving every possible assistance to an accused person to establish his innocence.

Again, the offence charged against Jesus was not a capital crime. It was not blasphemy to claim to be the Messiah, nor to call himself the Son of God, and even if he had pronounced the Divine name, which was the Jewish idea of blasphemy, he could not have been condemned to be crucified; for that form of execution was not recognized by Jewish law. The Jews had only four forms of capital punishment—stoning, burning, beheading and strangling. A false prophet was to be strangled, a blasphemer stoned. The body of a criminal stoned to death might be further dishonoured by being tied to a stake, but no Jew could be crucified alive at that period of the national history.

The illegalities are quite as striking in the alleged trial by Roman law.

In the first place, no prisoner was ever scourged before trial, as Pilate is said to have scourged Jesus.

Again, the insults and indignities heaped upon Jesus before the court, the scarlet robe, the crown of thorns, the spitting and beating, the taunts and scornful outcries could not have occurred in a Roman court of law, where the prisoner was always carefully protected both before and after conviction.

This feature of the drama suggests a curious historical item recorded by Philo on the occasion of the landing of King Agrippa in the harbour of Alexandria, where the rabble insulted the royal visitor by dressing up an idiotic vagrant named Karabas as a mock king, and setting him upon a high place with a crown of papyrus leaves upon his head, and a reed by way of sceptre in his hand, while a crowd of young men, with sticks for lances, surrounded him as a guard, and others carried on the jest by approaching the monarch with due solemnity to crave his mercy and ask his advice upon matters of state.

To say nothing of the remarkable resemblance between the names *Barabbas* and *Karabas*, it is certain that while such buffoonery might at a later period have been tolerated by a disaffected ruler in the streets of Alexandria, nothing of the kind could have happened in a law court at Jerusalem under a governor appointed by and responsible to the Emperor at Rome.

To return to the gospel narratives.

It is impossible that Pilate should have condemned to

death a man whom he believed to be innocent, and against whom no sufficient accusation was offered.

The alleged offence was not a crime in Roman law, and if Jesus had been guilty of treason he would not have been delivered to the Jews for punishment. Indeed, the falsity of the account is manifested by the contradiction involved in the surrender of Jesus to the Jews, and his subsequent crucifixion by the Romans. Moreover, under any circumstances, Jesus was exempt from crucifixion, because that form of punishment was rarely used, and then only in the case of a criminal of the lowest class, and only for the crimes of robbery, piracy, and assassination. The charges against Jesus as a Jew would have been a matter of indifference to Roman judges, and blasphemy was not a capital offence in the Roman code.

The description of the crucifixion is equally void of probability. The officials could not legally compel a passer-by to carry the cross for a criminal, and the passer-by would not have been likely to accept such an undertaking.

The inscription on a cross always declared the crime for which the accused suffered; but in this case no crime was indicated, and the inscription is quoted in four different ways by the four narrators.

Even the time of the crucifixion is not fixed. Mark says it was nine o'clock in the morning; John says the sentence was passed at noon: consequently the execution must have occurred later.

Again, the body of a crucified criminal was left on the cross until it decayed or was destroyed by birds, and it was guarded to prevent its being carried away. But the body of Jesus was taken down immediately after death and buried by his friends without opposition from his enemies or from the Roman authorities.

Again, death upon the cross was a lingering death of several days, or even a week, and more from starvation than from pain. Yet Jesus is said to have died at the end of six hours—a statement which, if true, would detract greatly from the magnitude of the sacrifice.

Finally, there were no such places as Gethsemane and Calvary, and no places answering to their description are to be found in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

In this case, as in several other incidents of the gospel story, the original writer would appear to have been a stranger to the face of the country of Judea, as well as to its social and political character.

(Reprinted) ELIZABETH B. EVANS

## Acid Drops

As a consequence of the death of a five-years-old boy, Kotherhithe (London) parents are protesting against the Sunday closing of the local recreation ground. They go about in perpetual fear for their children playing about the wharves, jetties and alleys of the waterfront. No doubt they thought that anxiety ended when the Council opened the new well-equipped playground—for which the mothers and fathers pay rates and taxes—last Christmas. But little they reckoned that their young innocents would be an offence to "the Lord" if play had been allowed to desecrate his sabbath and upset the Lord's Day Observers' Sunday dinners. So little Jimmy Clark was drowned. Those who attended our International Conference will recall the outside proclamation flaunting from the Lords' Day Observance offices in Red Lion Square, that "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun." With how much greater reason might the Society quote the hymn "Gentle Jesus . . . look upon a little child!" Yet we fear the L.D.O.S. would miss the purpose even of a crowd of little Jimmy's companions crying outside the offices "Our Jimmy's drowned!—Jimmy Clark's drowned, mister, cos he couldn't get into the rek-ration groun' on Sunday!"

We heard the other day of a "Mahomet Complex," which apparently most of us possess—wanting mountains to come to us—when, as Mr. Stephen Spender points out we have in the end to go to them instead. It

makes no difference to the pious—they assure us they come to them. Mr. Spender puts it satirically thus:—

Christ was quite right when He spoke of faith moving mountains, for faith is so blinding that those who have it are incapable of seeing that the mountains have not moved; they then start a campaign to convince others that the mountains have, in fact, moved; that is the history of all religions.

As Faith is believing without seeing, investigation is blasphemy.

The front page of the *Catholic Herald* was recently adorned (if that is the right word) by a picture of sixty-eight grown-up men, called priests. They were photographed lying prostrate on the ground in Nôtre Dame Cathedral. Of course even priests ought to be allowed to occupy this degrading pose if they like it. But what sort of a God can it be who feels flattered by human beings kneeling, and kissing a well-trodden church-floor? Commonsense would suggest that a king or anybody else, human or divine, might be expected to appreciate the tribute of men standing proudly erect—looking like men—than that of creatures lying down like the worms they profess to be.

We have not read the Rev. Conrad Noel's new book, *Jesus the Heretic*, but we read his previous work on a similar subject, and we are inclined to agree with the Dean of Exeter, who reviews it in the *Sunday Times*. The Dean accuses Mr. Noel of being "sketchy and discursive," and describes "the author's historical method" as "very selective" (a palpable hit at most religious "biographies of Jesus"). We admire the Dean's sarcastic conclusion:

He clearly wants to get rid of certain stumbling-blocks—imaginary, as he could say—which prevent some from taking Christianity seriously. This was worth doing, but better still would it have been if he had really grappled with his subject of "Jesus the Heretic." His prophetic capacity would have had better scope than in criticizing the Union Jack or the Royal Family.

How can the Pope—elected by his fellow-priests—imagine himself infallible? The question is often raised even by Catholics. We have never seen any explanation which attempts to offer a rational solution to the problem. This does not mean that nobody ever "explains" it. A Catholic journal gives the following amusing reply to an inquirer:—

Christ promised that error should have no place in His Church. If, therefore, a Pope made a free choice to define something that was false (whether he knew it to be false or not), all we can say is that God would most certainly intervene to prevent that definition. This is precisely what papal infallibility means.

Precisely!

One of the many silly "Daily Parables" which bore the readers of the *News-Chronicle* from day to day was:—

Clouds are not merely Darkeners of the Skies; they are Vessels of God's Power and Screens for His Rain-bows.

Farmers praying for fine weather will add a few unflattering descriptions to these poetic idiocies. Clouds which promise rain in times of drought are welcome enough. But "vessels of God's power" which threaten to destroy a year's harvest do not inspire reverent metaphor—most of us have heard the farmers call them "So and so clouds" at such times.

Leon Colline killed a young woman for whom he had deserted his wife, and was sent to prison last month. The Caen correspondent, who reports this, adds that before his life sentence Colline married, and his wife (which wife is not stated) says that he needs the "spiritual fortification" of re-marriage; so a priest arranged to perform

the ceremony. There's something very fishy about the increasing number of blood-stained repentants seeking priestly visas to the "Better Land." Can it be the "penitents" see a new opportunity to carry on their nefarious pursuits, by staging "hold-ups" and "bumpings-off" on the narrow path that leads to salvation? Certainly the "narrow path" promises them greater rewards than the "broad path" on which the gaol and guillotine stand for blood atonements.

It behoves good Catholics to "watch and pray"—anyhow, to watch for signs, wonders and miracles around Cork and Killarney. Why? Well, two Finchley (London) lads on holiday there took 26 sacred hosts from Fossa Church, near Killarney, and threw them into the hedges. Now the sacred host (properly written in capitals) is a wafer of bread consecrated for mass! What if the birds may have thought 'em just peckings?—there will surely be one or more of them inflamed with the holy spirit. St. Francis, with all his love for them, never thought of giving the birds a chance to be canonized. That's been left to two young infidels to bring about—we foresee. A fine chance here for a companion volume to *Penguin Island*!

Spain is in turmoil: Carlists, Fascists, Hapsburgs and other hangers-on all seeking Franco's favour. Meanwhile, hundreds (at least) are being murdered, and many thousands starve in the mountains and (reports H. J. Greenwell to the *Evening Standard*, from Bou), "in deserted quarries, drinking brackish water and eating roots." Wreckage and ruin is being repaired on the Spanish method of "To-morrow will do." Except in the case of church property (which was, of course, restored by Franco). Churches are being restored by convict labour. Let us trust a convicts' dedication will rest on their completion.

A new book has appeared with the title, *The Necessity of Christian Modernism*, by T. Wigley. But why the necessity of either Christianity or Modernism? One can understand, of course, the difficulty of anybody with intelligence unable to accept Christianity with its completely absurd theological doctrines; but in what way is Modernism so much superior, or why should it be more acceptable to an intelligent person? After all, the Modernist does believe in Jesus as a Man-God or a God-Man, and insists upon a whole-hearted belief in God the "Creator"; and it seems to us that if one can swallow to the full the God-idea, there ought to be no difficulty in swallowing the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Miracles, and all the other absurdities of the Bible; to say nothing of similar stories in the *Arabian Nights*. Unfortunately, the Modernist always takes for granted the reality of God, and from such a premise no serious argument can follow.

One of the writers in the *Church Times*, in quoting from the book of beastly German invective collected by W. G. Knopf, entitled *Beware of the English*, mentions the notorious "Hymn of Hate" so popular among the Germans at the beginning of the war, and adds that the author, Lissauer, was a Jew. This is quite true; but the disingenuous writer did not add—as he should have done—that Lissauer was a *Christian convert*, and that he wrote his "Hymn of Hate" when he was preaching his new religion of love.

Fr. White, O.P., at the final session of the Oxford School of Sociology, "warned the members that, unless there is a Christian revolution, young people will be attracted to Communism or Fascism." But why should a completely out of date religion be the alternative to the other two "ideologies"? Why should not our young people turn to Secularism with its insistence on broad toleration, humanism, and the work for happiness for all in this world? During the odd hundred years in which Secularism has motivated human conduct, more reforms, direct and indirect, have been achieved through its im-

pulse than has been the case of any other system known in history. That is a fact, however unpalatable it may be to Christians.

So far no miraculous cure from Lourdes has been reported; but two pilgrims died there the other week and were buried there. They were a Mrs. Dawson, who had a stroke on the journey, and instead of being "dipped" in the Holy Water, was transferred to hospital; and a Mrs. Gavin, who had to be left in the hospital when her contingent returned. Both cases were typical ones for miraculous cure and—death took place instead. Yet the Holy Fraud goes on!

A correspondent to a Catholic paper wants to know the name of the saint he can invoke to prevent his becoming bald. The patron saints of barbers are SS. Cosmos and Damian; unfortunately the paper's spiritual adviser seems to have so little faith in the efficacy of the two saints in the matter of growing hair—particularly as he admits "some of the saints may themselves have suffered from this distressing complaint"—that he advises the inquirer to consult a doctor! Which shows what he thinks of this invoking-saint's business for any illness.

Admittedly by the sole skill of surgeons, Cecil Eaton, a Tilbury stevedore who fell down a ship's hold and broke his spine in two places, now walks again. As a thanksgiving, he proposes to re-marry his wife at a Roman Catholic chapel to "make good" the sin she committed in marrying him at a registry office; she being of the Catholic persuasion. ("Persuasion" is a good word for coercion!). So holy church reclaims a lost sheep, gains a "convert," and, very possibly, the credit of a miraculous cure. Mr. Eaton had feared what might happen to his wife in the event of his death; he may now rest assured that the proselytizing of a priest will make not the slightest difference to the welfare of either of them except in the balance of Cecil's wage packet or other source of income.

Migration to new housing estates is said to be the reason why Christ Church, the largest and "most modern" church in Weymouth, has lost its congregation. Further it is said that the congregation's (or what was left of it) feelings were responsible for refusing an offer of £10,000 for its conversion into a luxury cinema. Therefore, in order to make something out of a white elephant, the rector, the Rev. E. I. Langston, got the parochial council's approval to turn it into a "Children's Church." The "vicar" is to be a youth about 18 years of age, unordained, and children are to be the wardens, readers and choir until, at the age of 14, they may be confirmed, and attend the senior parish church of St. Mary's. Let's hope the kids have some jolly games in their new playground.

## Fifty Years Ago

WHAT should we think of a man who had been taking jalap for a year and, finding himself worse at the end, came to the conclusion that the one thing he wanted was more jalap? Yet this seems to us the position of men like Father Barry, who look to religion to cure us of our social ills. He asks in effect Socialists, Democrats, and lovers of progress and the amelioration of man on earth, to invite, or at any rate allow, the Church to take the direction of their movements. Then all will be well. We answer, your day of trial has passed. History has given its verdict. The time, toil, riches, research, attention, and devotion, bestowed on religion have been worse than thrown away. It has positively been a hindrance to human progress. Nor can it be expected that priests, celibate priests above all, will ever be in a position even to adequately sympathize with the common wants of humanity.

The Freethinker, August 18, 1889

To get a New Subscriber is to make a New Friend

# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No. : CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- E. WASHLY.**—The statement you cite is quite misleading. The facts are as follows. Bradlaugh never refused to take the oath. Acting on the best legal advice he went to the House believing that he had the right to affirm. When that was refused him, he said he would take the oath and, although the religious part of it was quite meaningless to him, would observe the spirit of it. This was refused him, and the constitutional issue was raised whether the House could refuse a properly elected representative. In the end Bradlaugh won, and eventually secured the passing of the Oath's Amendment Act, which gave one the right to affirm in every case where an oath was normally required. We think sheer malice inspired the passage you cite. Congratulations to your wife.
- S. RICHARDS.**—Thanks, but we are not so well as might be, and hope to be able to take another brief holiday before the summer is quite over, but a holiday of a month is out of the question for several reasons. We are as careful as we can be.
- B. ROBshaw.**—Obliged for cuttings.
- A. WHITEFIELD.**—We do not know of any book dealing with the subject, but it is likely the Society itself may publish an account of its aims and objects.
- W. WALTERS.**—We much appreciate what you are doing. It is no light burden to have the responsibility for a paper such as the *Freethinker* year after year, and all help is welcome.
- J. NEIL.**—Thanks for papers; also congratulations upon entering your eightieth year. We hope your remaining days will be free from all escapable troubles. You have an active life on which to look back, and that is one thing in which we old ones have an advantage over the young generation.
- J. HALL AND A. C. PRATT.**—Thanks for your efforts for new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.
- H. GALE.**—Your story is quite appropriate, but it has already appeared in the *Freethinker* in connexion with another incident.
- T. WILLIAMS.**—We will bear your suggestion in mind when we have time to deal with the subject. We are obliged for what you are doing.
- I. CHEETHAM.**—Naturally not many of our newspapers will dare affront the parsonry by calling attention to the humbug of setting down a recruit as belonging to some Church, when the man distinctly repudiates any such attachment. It is not a good beginning to cheat a man out of his legal rights, and then practically force him to take part in a Church Parade.
- W. A. WILLIAMS.**—Thanks for cuttings. Why not send us a brief account of the whole matter? We are sure it would prove of interest to our readers.

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

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

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

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

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

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—

One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

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

## Sugar Plums

Once again we thank our friends for the steady help they give in introducing the *Freethinker* to likely subscribers. Many of those who have in this way made their first acquaintance with us write expressing their pleasure at the new field that is opened to them. Others write asking for the copies to be discontinued. Some are shocked. Some write advising us to pray, and suggest that if we believe hard enough we shall "see the light." That last puts us in an awkward situation. Because, if we believe hard enough, we do not need conversion, and, if we do not believe, we shall not be converted. So that in the end we look like being damned because we cannot work a miracle. But if we could work a miracle we should—oh, here we are in the same old circle. So we had better give it up.

But one gentleman who has been reading the paper for several weeks takes another point of view. He is quite pleased with some parts of the paper because of the excellence of what is said. But there are other articles with which he is not in agreement, at least not in complete agreement, and therefore he is thinking of ceasing to read the *Freethinker*. We are not at all surprised at anyone disagreeing with some parts of the paper. We usually feel that way ourselves, and sometimes our disagreement is so strong that we write something in reply to what has been printed. But our aim is not to publish a paper in which all the writers sing the same song, to the same air and the same words. We only concern ourselves with the consideration whether the matter is suitable to the paper, and whether the writer expresses himself clearly and properly. We are writing for men and women who value a difference of opinion as being of value in itself. It may lead to enlightenment. Continuous agreement means that no great advance can be made. And we aim at creating Freethinkers, not founding a new church or another political party.

The Secular Education League has published the following questionnaire for use at parliamentary elections:—

### QUESTIONS TO PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES

Is the Candidate in favour of a policy of Secular Education in order to end the dual system at present in vogue, a system which is inequitable as between different sections of the people, involves the subsidising by the State of sectarian religious instruction, perpetuates quarrels between the different religious bodies, is detrimental to the interests of the child, inflicts gross injustice upon the teachers, and sets up sectarian barriers in a region where unity should prevail?

Copies can be obtained, post free, from the Secretary of the League, Miss N. Freeman, Secular Education League, 12 Palmer Street, S.W.7.

Writing on false views of "Race," Cedric Dover, in *Reynolds*, after discussing Nazi, Fascist and other errors, says:—

In England racialism is not acute, but it is not so superficial as is generally imagined. I know that gentlemen are inclined to regard it as ungentlemanly. "Here there is chivalry," writes Mr. Louis Golding in his honeyed book on "The Jewish Problem," "and there is God. It cannot happen here."

But I also know that neither chivalry nor God has ever prevented racialism when the economic stimulus is there. I have seen it happen here. More, I have seen a slow but steady increase in prejudice against Jews and coloured people, in response to the decline of prosperity and the growth of discontent in the Empire.

It can happen here. And if we close our eyes with self-adulation, if we do not rally all our forces against reaction and racialism it will happen here. Make no wishful mistake about that. The clowns are already on parade. The circuses are not far behind.

And we might add that if it *does* happen here, the ring-master of the circus will be—a Papist. For, like Nero,

the Pope sits above the arena gloating on the combats between democratic gladiators and totalitarian slaves with "thumbs down" against the former every time. "Out of this nettle"-rash of dictator-irritants (thanks, Neville) holy papa hopes to pluck the flower of *supreme temporal power* once more.

The debate arranged by the West Ham and Bethnal Green Branches, between Mr. Phillips of the Stratford Spiritual Church and Mr. Goldman, took place on Monday, July 24. Mr. Phillips' exposition of the subject, "Has Man a Soul?" was an earnest attempt to present his beliefs to the best of his ability. Mr. Goldman, in answering, appeared quite at ease as he dealt convincingly with the points raised by his opponent. A number of questions of a diverse character, directed to the speakers after the debate, gave added interest, although one might have wished that they had followed more closely the question of the evening. The meeting was well-attended.

The *Cannock Chase Labour Gazette* reprints in its issue for August 8, with due acknowledgements, an article on the coming invasion of Czechoslovakia from the *Freethinker* of three years ago. It is a pity that our Government was unable to read the future so clearly.

The Park and Bandstand in Chester-le-Street are often used for religious gatherings, and Mr. J. T. Brighton has secured their use for a Freethought Demonstration on August 27. There will be several speakers, and Mr. Brighton is asking Freethinkers in the North for as much support as they are able to give. We suggest the making up of parties from the towns in the neighbourhood. It is an effort that deserves success. Mr. Brighton is doing some very useful work in the district, and deserves all the encouragement that can be given him.

Mr. G. Whitehead will commence his week in Birmingham to-day (August 20) with two meetings in the Bull Ring, timed for 3 and 7 p.m. For the rest of the week, meetings will be held each evening at 7.30 p.m.; also in the Bull Ring. The local N.S.S. Branch will take full advantage of the series of open-air lectures, and invites the support of the large number of Freethinkers in the area.

From the *Beds. and Herts. Evening Telegraph* :—

A visit to Luton of Charles Bradlaugh, champion of working men and political reformer, was recalled by Rotarian C. H. Battle, of Northampton, in a talk to Luton Rotary Club yesterday.

Bradlaugh spent 25 years in Northampton, which has a statue to his memory.

In a review of his life and work, Rotarian Battle quoted an extract from a biography, *The Life of Charles Bradlaugh*.

Of a visit to Luton Bradlaugh was reported to have said "Great spontaneity and heartiness met us at Luton which, for a small town gave us great welcome. It had been arranged that a conference of delegates should be held, previous to the Town Hall meeting, at Messrs. Wills and Company's factory. Much to the delegates' amazement when they reached the factory gates they found a crowd of several thousand persons collected there. The gathering was such that no living man had ever seen in the still increasing town."

Bradlaugh, said Rotarian Battle, was educated in a "ragged school," made Northampton famous, and became one of its representatives in Parliament.

### God's Cocktail

TAKE a swig at the Sacrament,  
It's bully, though they call it Blood;  
It would not matter if they called it Mud,  
On Wine their cash was spent:  
They call it Blood, a Sacrament Divine,  
But take a swig, for it is good port wine.

B.S.

## Dolet: The Freethought Martyr\*

(Continued from page 525)

V.

DOLET soon had the first volume of his *Commentaries* ready for the press. In transcribing and correcting it he was assisted by Jean Bonaventure Desperiers, whom Mr. Christie justly calls "one of the greatest names in the French literature of the sixteenth century." His "*Cymbalum Mundi*," published in 1537-8, gave great offence to the Sorbonne. Its witty dialogues ostensibly satirized the Pagan deities, but it was easily to be seen that the myths of the Christian religion were also glanced at. The Sorbonne condemned the book as blasphemous, and the Parliament imprisoned Jean Morin, the printer, and burned all the copies that could be found. The *auto-da-fé* was so successful that only one copy is known to have survived. It is now in the Public Library of Versailles. The "*Cymbalum Mundi*" is included in the admirable edition of Desperiers, which we owe to the indefatigable bibliophile Jacob.

On the 21st of March, 1536, Dolet obtained permission to publish his *Commentaries*. The first volume was issued in May. "It is," says Mr. Christie, "certainly one of the most important contributions to Latin scholarship which the sixteenth century produced." The second volume followed two years and a half later. In the dissertations Dolet "seems to show that he had a presentiment and foreshadowing of his terrible fate. In one place he prays that his life may never depend on the sentence of a judge; in another he confesses that he has no desire to die before his time, yet that he accompanies his devotion to letters with a constant meditation on and recollection of death."

While Dolet was labouring at these and other literary tasks, he appears to have spent his leisure not unjoyously. Mr. Christie writes:—

He was by no means an anchorite or an ascetic. No man more thoroughly enjoyed the society of literary men, nor was he averse in moderation to the pleasures of the table. He was poor, not because he saw any merit in poverty, but because he loved learning better than wealth. He despised all the ascetic virtues even while to a certain extent he followed some of them. Poverty, chastity, humility, obedience, indolent solitude, self-inflicted pain, were in themselves no virtues to him, any more than they were to Aristotle, Plato, or Cicero, any more than they were to Luther or Erasmus, to Bembo or Rabelais. But there was one thing he more especially enjoyed, and which shows him to us in an unexpected light. He was devotedly fond of music. "Music and harmony," he tells us, "are my sole enjoyments. What is there more suited either for exciting or soothing the mind, what more fitted for allaying or extinguishing, or even rousing indignation? What is there more efficacious for refreshing the jaded spirits of men of letters? I care nothing for the pleasures of the table, of wine, of gaming, of love—at least I use them all in great moderation. But not so as regards music, which alone of all pleasures takes me captive, retains me, and dissolves me in ecstasy."

He was also very fond of swimming in the river. Altogether his tastes were healthy, and bespoke a sound and even fine nature.

On the last day of December, 1536, a painter named Campaign tried to assassinate Dolet, who in defending himself killed his adversary. As he had already made himself obnoxious to some persons in authority, he dreaded being tried there, and by the assistance of

\* Etienne Dolet, the Martyr of the Renaissance: A Biography. By R. C. Christie. Macmillan & Co. A review reprinted from the *Freethinker* of 1881.

his friends he escaped before daylight from the city. He fled to Paris, where, before his arrival, his friends had procured for him the royal pardon. But when he returned to Lyons the authorities disregarded it and threw him into prison. He remained there until the 21st April, when he was provisionally set at liberty on giving security to appear for judgment when called upon.

Early in 1538 Dolet married, and we see by his works that the union was one of affection and a source of great happiness. His wife's name has not come down to us, but Mr. Christie supposes her to have been related to Nicole Paris, a printer of Troyes. One son, Claude, was the fruit of this marriage. What became of him and the widow after Dolet's martyrdom is uncertain. M. Boulmier concludes that "his mother perhaps sought an asylum far from the city which gave him birth, where they could live together in retirement, unknown, and sheltered from the persecutions of the devotees and too zealous defenders of the Catholic religion." But Mr. Christie thinks he has traced the unfortunate Claude back to Troyes, the supposed native town of his mother, where he became a flourishing citizen, and was elected as sheriff at the age of forty-seven.

Soon after his marriage Dolet, very wisely resolving not to trust to the slender and precarious income of a man of letters, decided to engage in business as a printer; and on the 6th of March, 1538, he obtained a privilege or licence from the King. Before the end of the year his press was set up, and at least one book printed at it. Printers then could not be louts; they were obliged to be scholars, and their profession was held in high esteem. Even booksellers had to know something of the insides of the articles they sold, unlike the present tribe who often, as George Eliot remarks, trade in books just as a provision dealer may trade in tinned stuffs without knowing or caring whether they contain rotteness or nutriment.

Dolet printed for Marot, Rabelais, and other writers, as well as works from his own pen. Yet he seems to have quarrelled with both these great men. The quarrels of authors, however, are proverbial, and we need not at this remote period concern ourselves to allot their respective shares of blame. Dolet's editions of Marot and Rabelais are much sought after; they have for many years fetched enormous prices, and they will perhaps hereafter be still more highly valued.

We are now approaching the bitter end of Dolet's career. In our next article we shall conclude this biographical sketch, and give a brief account of Dolet's opinions on those great subjects which have always fascinated the human mind.

G. W. FOOTE

(To be concluded)

#### CHRISTIANITY AND DEATH

It was Christianity, and Christianity alone, that made death an abiding terror to the European mind. The baser elements which existed in the Pagan world were eagerly seized upon by Christian writers and developed to their fullest extent. Some of the pagan writers had speculated, in a more or less fanciful manner, on a hell of a thousand years. Christianity stretched it to eternity. Pre-Christians had reserved the miseries of the after life for adults. Christians paved the floor of hell with infants, scarce a span long. Plutarch and other Pagan moralists had poured discredit upon the popular notion of a future life. Christianity reaffirmed them with all the exaggerations of diseased imagination. The Pagans held that death was as normal and as natural as life. Christianity returned to the conception current among savages and depicted death as a penal infliction. The Pagan art of living was superseded by the Christian art of dying.

## Jesus and His Women Friends

### PART FIRST

#### THE LIST

I. THE SINNER.—Luke is the evangelist who tells of this woman.<sup>1</sup> He introduces her shortly before describing the appeasement of the storm, the exorcism at Gadara, and the resuscitation of Jairus' daughter, three alleged miracles which Jesus is said to have wrought consecutively at a time anterior to his final departure for Jerusalem. The account is as follows. Simon, a Pharisee, invited Jesus to a meal at his house. A woman, described as "a sinner," hearing in the city that Jesus was at Simon's, came thither with an alabaster cruse of ointment; stood weeping by the feet of Jesus; wet them with her tears; wiped them with her hair; kissed them; and anointed them with the ointment. On seeing this abandoned behaviour, Simon conceived slighting thoughts of Jesus; but, he, discerning them, related a parable of two debtors, whose two debts, differing greatly in size, were both remitted by the common creditor. Then, he asked Simon, Which of the two forgiven debtors would feel the most love towards their forgiver? The larger debtor was Simon's choice. Indicating the woman, and addressing his host, Jesus contrasted him with her, saying that from him he had received no kiss of welcome, no water for his feet, no oil for his head; whereas she had wetted his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, anointed them with ointment, and was still kissing them unceasingly. "Wherefore," he added, "I say unto thee: her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven *the same loveth little*." Then to the woman he said "Thy sins are forgiven." It has been, and yet is, almost universally believed, that the woman who figures in this dramatic story was intended by the writer to be taken for a harlot. But the word *hamartolos* which he uses to describe her does not confirm that belief, for it only means some one who is in a moral sense erring, or trespassing, or out of the right way.

Luke in the chapter immediately preceeding the one which describes the scene at the house of Simon the Pharisee, represents Jesus as teaching that we deserve no thanks for showing love, or displaying kindness, or making loans, if we hope to get a return for these actions, because "even sinners" love, help, and loan, on terms of reciprocation, and requital. Here, in three verses (32-34), the plural of *hamartolos* is used in each verse, the final one reading "even sinners lend to sinners to receive again as much." It is absurd to suppose that in the cases just quoted, the word "sinners" has the restrictive meaning of "harlots." The probability is that it means "Gentiles." Paul, addressing Peter, says, "We [are] Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles" (Gal. ii. 15). This sense of the word, as a term of disesteem for Gentiles, was in current use among the Jews. Jesus himself thus employed it. For, whilst in *Matthew* (xx. 19), *Mark* (x. 33), and *Luke* (xxviii. 32), he foretells his being delivered "to the Gentiles"; in *Matthew* (xxvi. 45) he announces his actual delivery "into the hands of sinners," or, as it is in *Mark* (xiv. 41 [Greek]) "into the hands of the sinners," meaning the Roman authorities, i.e., "the Gentiles," specified in his above prophecy. The word is found elsewhere in the New Testament with the self-same meaning. There it never stands for "harlot," the term employed for such a woman being *porne*, which occurs several times. Probably the violent emotion, and the utter disregard of convention, which the woman displayed, gave rise

<sup>1</sup> vii. 36-50.

to the thought that she belonged to the desperate sisterhood. The account credits Simon with thinking that had Jesus been a prophet he would have known what she was. But, perhaps, he was only thinking that Jesus ought to have known that she was a Gentile. Whether Simon himself regarded her as a harlot, or as a Gentile, it is passing strange that he permitted her to behave thus in his house, for he was a Pharisee, and the Pharisees held very strict views about both women and Gentiles. The parable of the two debtors was not intended to contrast Simon with the woman, but to explain the woman's behaviour. There is no intimation that Jesus had ever forgiven Simon any kind of sins; and he certainly did not forgive the discourtesy which he received from him on the present visit. The contrast subsequently drawn between Simon and the woman, as regards their respective conduct towards Jesus on this occasion, had no other purpose than Simon's humiliation. The reason why Jesus forgave the woman is worthy of close attention. He said it was because "she loved much." The Greek word which here both our versions render "loved" is in the aorist tense of the indicative mood. This tense, although it usually expresses past action occurring at an indefinite time, occasionally expresses what was and has never ceased to be. This last is evidently the sense here intended. Jesus forgave the woman, not because she had loved him once upon a time, but because her love for him had continued ever since it began. Besides this, as Jesus had forgiven her because of having received her love, even so, she loved him the more because of having received his forgiveness; and this accession, if measured by the rule applied in the parable of the two debtors, was evidently large. Grave infidelity is the only supposition that meets the case. The last two verses of the account contain an anti-climax which must be regarded as a theological gloss. There the guests say in or among, themselves, "Who is this that even forgiveth sins?" whereupon Jesus says to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." But, when it is remembered how often, and how insistently, Jesus taught the duty of forgiveness; and that Luke himself, in the very chapter preceding that wherein he records the present incident, represents him as teaching this duty in the most extravagant terms, after having attracted the attention of great multitudes from various parts, it appears strange indeed that those who sat with him at Simon's table should wonder at his practising his own favourite doctrine. As for the words, "Thy faith hath saved thee," they are obviously borrowed from Mark (x. 52) who relates that once when a blind man had asked Jesus to give him sight, Jesus gave it him, saying, "Thy faith hath saved thee."<sup>2</sup> As reported by Mark, the words are apposite, for the man was performing an act of faith; but, as reported by Luke, they are inapposite, because the woman was performing an act of love.

II. Mary the Magdalene.<sup>3</sup> This woman Luke introduces after having introduced the sinner in his preceding chapter. Magdala, the town on the Sea of Galilee, whence she is supposed to have derived her descriptive epithet, is not named in the accredited reading of any text either in the New Testament, or in the works of Josephus; but the Talmud describes it

<sup>2</sup> The Greek New Testament prepared by Professor Bernhard Nestle, D.D., of Maulbronn for the British and Foreign Bible Society [Ed. 1919] gives the words *sésokén* as the one used on both the above occasions.

<sup>3</sup> "Magdalene" is not a proper noun like "Mary," but the qualification of a proper noun, as in the case of Milo the Crotonian. Mary has her qualification thrice in *Matthew*, four times in *Mark*, twice in *Luke*, and twice in *John*. *Matthew* (twice), and *John* (once), call her "Marian" (see Dr. Nestle's Greek Text above cited). *Luke* has "Mary the one named Magdalene" (viii. 1).

as a somewhat wealthy place, and attributes its destruction to its "licentiousness."<sup>4</sup> If Magdala had at Mary's day the same reputation which Corinth had in Paul's time, and which Nottingham had in the days of my youth, this fact together with Luke's juxtaposition of Mary and The Sinner may have given rise to the widely-spread belief that the two are one, an opinion seemingly devoid of other evidence. In the passage above referred to, Luke says that Mary who was called Magdalene, Joanna wife of Chusa, Herod's steward, and many other women, who had been healed of evil spirits, and infirmities, afforded sustenance to Jesus and his disciples during their peripatations at the period in question. He affirms in particular that out of Mary had gone no less than seven devils, and we learn from Mark (xvi. 9) that Jesus himself had expelled these fiends. If Mary the Magdalene really were the Sinner, this curious statement means in modern language that she was a violent nymphomaniac; and that Jesus, the master psychologist of his age, had appeased her tumultuous desires, even as he once allayed the turbulent billows of the raging lake; the boon then bestowed giving her a trust resembling that which, after the flight of long ages, a poet, closely akin to her in temperament, thus delicately expressed:—

When high the storms of passion rise,  
And half o'erwhelm my sinking soul,  
My soul a sudden calm shall feel,  
And hear a whisper, "Peace be still!"

There is no further reference to Mary the Magdalene until the Crucifixion. *Matthew* (xxvii. 55, 56) names her and two others as among the many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, and who "from afar" witnessed his agony and death. *Mark* (xv. 40, 41) names Mary the Magdalene and two other women. Of the final ones, the first is *Matthew's* first, and the second is probably *Matthew's* second. *Mark* says that the three were among those who had followed Jesus and ministered unto him when he was in Galilee, and that they together with many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem witnessed "from afar" his fate upon the cross. *Luke* (xxiii. 49), without mentioning any names, says that the women who had come along with Jesus from Galilee beheld from "afar off," how he suffered and died. *John* (xix. 25) says that Mary, mother of Jesus, Mary, her sister, and Mary the Magdalene "stood by the cross of Jesus." Here he differs greatly from *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, who agree in affirming that the watchers were at a considerable distance from the place where Jesus was executed; and who also agree in omitting Mary, the mother of Jesus, from the list of witnesses.

C. CLAYTON DOVE

(To be continued)

<sup>4</sup> *Ency. Bib.* Vol. III., col. 2895.

Persecution is not refutation, nor even triumph: the "wretched infidel" as he is called, is probably happier in his prison than the proudest of his assailants.—*Byron*.

#### GOD'S GOODNESS

This is a gloomy day, with ceaseless rain. My head is bursting, my heart is broken.

The air is thick and heavy, the sky black as ink. A genuine day of death and burial.

How often there recurs to my mind that exclamation of Schopenhauer, at the spectacle of human iniquity: "If God created the world, I would not be God."

*Dreyfus "Diary" Written on Devil's Isle*

## Is Marriage the Best Compromise?

MARRIAGE is in the news. Several daily journals have recently published special articles and invited correspondence. Most of these series have closed on a note of triumphal vindication—confirming matrimony as unshakable, and in the main beyond criticism.

In a Christian country, no family newspaper could very well do otherwise, appealing as they do to a "packed" court, and having their circulation and the support of orthodoxy very much to consider. But is that the whole story?

The following brief survey of marriage in Western Europe assumes at the outset that, like all human institutions, it is open to modification, and is not to be regarded as absolute. It is further assumed that it is advisable *at present* to regard it as a necessity—mainly for economic and architectural reasons, and that as a factor affecting human happiness its influence extends far beyond those directly concerned (e.g., moulding the prospects of youth, the memory of age, etc.).

We shall hold further, that as an institution it is far from conforming with the requirements of modern times and thought—has no transcendental significance whatsoever, nor pre-ordained status, and was instituted for utilitarian purposes at a level of culture now far removed, and finally, that its modification can only be effected satisfactorily along rational lines in the light of co-operation with Nature and contemporary psychology. Let us examine its utility.

Marriage is easily effected and irreversible. For the broad purpose of reproduction and the economic security of children it is applied in the vast majority of cases between couples subject to psychological conditions which are well known to preclude any sense of expedient selection. The average couple thus undertakes an irrevocable contract at the dictates of an instinct which is by its very nature transient. The penalty is all too often exacted in silence behind a million closed doors.

Anthropology indicates the periodic occurrence of mutual attraction with a view only to potential procreation—an essentially temporary compulsion, kept alive in civilization much longer than in nature, by elaborate traditional taboos which stimulate and transmute it to a point of ecstatic unreality, simulating prospects of future happiness in which She—Nature—has not the slightest interest. In a minority of cases, the motive is economic or even less spontaneous and worthy.

Thus, under the present system, all "normal" marriages are *ipso facto* potentially unstable and ill-equipped for the stupendous test involved in their obligations—no less than a lifetime in *unnaturally* close contact. It follows from this that "perfect" unions are almost always the result of pure accident, or the incredible capacity for compromise which brave souls bring to bear upon them.

Careful observers cannot have failed to remark that all the extremely powerful and ubiquitous social sanctions and legal pressure inseparable from the present system are only just able to keep the majority of marriages intact. What would be the outcome of any relaxation? and what would the inevitable result signify? Few can deny the implication. It means that the institution as a voluntary contract is of such a quality, that left to itself it would cease to exist. That is a formidable indictment, but I believe it to be true. Few autocratic institutions can empower so vast an unpaid army of conscientious inquisitors as those whose self-imposed duty keeps them ever behind the chinks in the curtain, or attending back-gar-

den inquests, lest one of their bolder or more fortunate number should escape. Small wonder that there is so much unhappiness—so much useless and soul-killing frustration, and the ability for the few heroic contractors to justify their position is no indication as to the nature of the contract.

What then is the remedy? As things are at present, and human institutions can but cater for the immediate age, I see but one, a new conception of matrimonial obligations with enormously increased spiritual and social freedom on both sides.

There are some wise couples who have already adopted this principle, enjoying the benefits of a spiritual ménage which makes their homes models of all that might and could be general experience. But since this is only possible where both parties agree to relinquish the irresistible social forces available at the first whimper to the possessive, such enlightened folk can wield little influence.

So strong is tradition, that sociologists find anything like an exact estimate of happiness in marriage most difficult to reach. A graph resulting from a recent *Daily Mail* questionnaire is signally illuminating. I have it before me, and from it one notes that the highest success figures of happiness in marriage occur at the lowest level of intellectual attainment, and that the next highest are where long periods of separation are involved. The proportion of happy couples among the remaining groups deteriorates progressively in inverse ratio to cultural attainments. One has only to imagine the effects of universal education which would raise the intellectual standard of the whole community, to see the true import of these figures, for it would seem that the higher the intellectual faculties and imaginative potentialities, the less easy it is to find complete fulfilment in the exclusive companionship of one other person.

It is the traditionally inviolable sanctity of homes which has hitherto prevented their proper ventilation, and has supported centuries of private persecution which would not for one moment be tolerated outside.

"All is wrong outside marriage," with its iniquitous corollary "all is right within it," has resulted in a human bondage which in any other sphere would not have been tolerated in the dark ages. But there will be few who hear.

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

## Women and Religion

As a constant woman reader of the *Freethinker*, I feel interested (but I am afraid not "inspired") to try and explain why religion, or rather attendance at church, appears to attract so large a ratio of my sex. (See "Acid Drops," August 6).

Comparatively few young women attend church services unless it be their own marriage ceremony or that of a friend. On such occasions the churches are filled to overflowing, not with women eager for spiritual guidance, but with eagle-eyed females intent on their own and their neighbours' adornments. I have often wondered why the parsons do not organize such ceremonies more frequently with the holy object of filling the churches. Why not a fashion parade down the aisle every afternoon accompanied by appropriate organ music? These could be extended to twice nightly performances to give the working woman a chance to see the show.

However, as regards the middle-aged women who are far more ardent adherents of both church and chapel than their young sisters, fashion displays are not the only draw. Any woman who has reached the age of forty and still attends church, presents a hopeless case of arrested mental development. Usually she is ignorant, hemmed in by stupid prejudices and conventions, and violently

antagonistic to any one who attempts to break down those conventions. Oozing with repellent self-righteousness she stumps up to church every Sunday morning to worship not goodness but respectability, which has become her god. Often, in the cause of the church, she applies herself to "rescue work," and helps to strengthen those very bonds of convention which fetter her own sex. Worst of all she is ready to make a lackey of herself for a church whose teachings are a humiliation to every self-respecting woman. But these middle-aged "hand-maidens" are such slaves to a narrow convention that they actually enjoy and pride themselves on their "church work."

Then there are the old female stalwarts of the church, ranging in age from about sixty to even a hundred. Decrepit outwardly, many of them nurse a lively, vicious spirit within. True to Christian custom they croak hymns on one day of the week, and on the remaining six days indulge in spiteful local gossip, and have been known sometimes to attack even the vicar's wife. For such women local church affairs provide the sole interest of their declining years, and they cling about the bulwark of the church like hoary old barnacles.

Only too often these women hope to find in the church teachings some comfort against their haunting but unmentionable fears of what may be in store for them after death. Although they speak confidently of their heavenly life hereafter, yet they cling desperately to a decaying earthly existence. Most of these older women have been reared from childhood upwards on a religion of Hell and Judgment, and to slacken off their church attendance just when the sands of life are almost spent would be like deliberately courting their own damnation.

No doubt the social events organized by the church attract many rather empty-headed women who derive a pleasurable sense of satisfaction from officiating at Bazaars and Poor Children's Treats. They probably think that poor children were specially created by God so that the sweet grace of charity might flourish among the rich. Such women devote their spare time to church work while their equally fatuous husbands devote theirs to golf and cricket. But the humbug and hypocrisy of a certain type of parson will nauseate most men while many gushing women revel in it.

Religion used to appeal to many girls and young women who would fondly weave romantic dreams around the person of some unsuspecting vicar or curate. Naturally these girls attended the church services assiduously, but the present generation of young romantics finds all its dreams entrancingly depicted in black and white on the screen at the local cinema.

But there are other older women who try to find some consolation in the Christian religion itself, hoping it may fill an aching emptiness in their drab, incomplete lives. Usually they are spinsters, unhappily married or childless women. Often they find a strange emotional, almost sensual delight in the church services and in the worship of Jesus Christ. Their suppressed love and affection is perverted into a gnawing, sometimes a morbid religious fervour, and many a potentially rich and useful life is partly wasted in this way. Such women are to be pitied rather than despised, for often their incomplete lives have been due to narrow social conventions fostered by the Church itself.

This only touches on a very few of the reasons why religion attracts so large a number of the female sex. There are many reasons of a more subtle psychological significance which I have not the knowledge to explain adequately. Until a few years ago church-going was a national institution, never to be questioned. But women are slowly learning that, ever since St. Paul preached, the church has done all in its power to subjugate the sex and cripple its freedom. Most younger women realize this, and consequently they boycott the church; but there still exist some primitive-minded young females with a passion for ritual, who fervently attend every meaningless church ceremony.

MARY BRANGWEN

Religion, when it can no longer burn us alive, comes to us begging.—Heine.

## Correspondence

### WHEAT AS A CURRENCY BASIS TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—As far as I can see, the main arguments against wheat being made the basis of currency, as suggested in the article, "Subjects of General Interest, *Freethinker*, August 6, 1939, are:—

Wheat deteriorates; it frequently suffers from weevil damage; it is bulky and expensive to store.

At present it would cost about £150 to carry £1,000 worth from, say, July, 1939, to March, 1940.

It is incorrect to say that two or three years consumptive requirements are in store now; nor were there such supplies even in 1930 to 1932, when wheat prices in Argentina, Canada and the U.S.A. touched lower figures than those quoted to-day.

The great wheat port of Liverpool is unable to store more than about 200,000 tons, which is equal to about only four weeks' requirements for the British Isles.

C. A. MORRISON

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON

#### OUTDOOR

BETHNAL GREEN AND HACKNEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.30, Mr. P. Goldman.

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

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.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 7.0, Mr. F. A. Ridley. Rushcroft Road, opposite Brixton Town Hall, 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. L. Ebury. Liverpool Grove, Walworth Road, 8.0, Friday, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 8.0, Wednesday, Mrs. Buxton and Mr. Carpenter. 8.0, Thursday, Mr. Saphin. 8.0, Friday, Mr. Barnes. 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Tuson and Collins. 7.30, Sunday, Messrs. Barnes, Dunne, Tuson and Wood.

### COUNTRY

#### OUTDOOR

ACCRINGTON MARKET: 7.0, Sunday, Mr. J. Clayton.

BIRKENHEAD BRANCH N.S.S. (Haymarket): 8.0, Saturday, Mr. D. Robinson. Well Lane Corner, 8.0, Wednesday, Mr. W. Parry (Liverpool).

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bull Ring): 3.0 and 7.0, Sunday. 7.30, Monday till Friday. Mr. G. Whitehead will lecture each evening.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Mound): 7.0, Mr. Frank Smithies—"This Comic Cosmos."

FOULDRIDGE: 7.45, Friday, Mr. J. Clayton.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Albert Road): Tuesday, 8.0, Thursday, 8.0, Minard Road, Friday, 8.0, Rose Street, Sauchiehall Street. Muriel Whitefield will speak at these meetings.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Eccles Market): 8.0, Friday Bury Market, 8.0, Saturday. Ashton Market, 7.30, Sunday. Blackburn, 7.40, Monday. Chorley, 8.0, Tuesday. Mr. W. A. Atkinson will speak at these meetings.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Stevenson Square): 7.0, Sunday, Messrs. G. H. Taylor, C. McCall, Junr. and S. Newton.

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

OSWALDTWISTLE: 7.30, Monday, Mr. J. Clayton.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Gillbridge Avenue): 7.0, Sunday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

TATFIELD (The Bridge): 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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SECULARISM affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, and that human effort should be wholly directed towards its improvement: it asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

Secularism affirms that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; it affirms that liberty belongs of right to all, and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilized State.

Secularism affirms that morality is social in origin and application, and aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.

Secularism demands the complete secularization of the State, and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organizations it seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of peoples as a means of advancing international peace, to further common cultural interests, and to develop the freedom and dignity of man.

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