

# THE FREETHINKER

EDITED by CHAPMAN COHEN

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

Views and Opinions

The Conscientious Objector

I EXPECT that what I am about to say this week will not greatly please many of my readers. But in that case I lay the flattering unction to my soul, that I do not make a practice of writing to please anyone. To do that, as I have so often said, is just a shade less objectionable than writing in fear of offending anyone. If what I write pleases readers, so much the better. If it does not, well, in that case I shall have at least brought home the fact that there is more than one way of looking at the same problem, and this may force examination of the other side. Without doing this, I question whether anyone has a full right to say that he has any opinion at all. Without a sense of opposition one may have a prejudice for or against, one has no right to say that he has an opinion. The root meaning of opinion is a judgment that falls short of authority to call itself a certainty. If I know that John Smith has been passing forged notes, I do not say that "in my opinion" he has done so. I say he has done so. If I say I have an opinion that he has, I am confessing that there is some doubt of the truth of my statement.

To have an opinion is, then, to reach a conclusion in the face of testimony that cannot command certainty. And for that reason we are justified in saying that the man who does not know the other side of the case has no right to say that he has any opinion at all. That, of course, would put most people out of court altogether. For most people simply will not look at the other side. Of course they commence their statement with "In my opinion," but that is just camouflage. The more correct statement would be, "What I say is—" That is all there is in it. What they say (and, if a parrot could formulate a lengthy statement, what it says) would be almost as intellectually enlightened.

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Conscription

At the moment Conscription is here, the question of conscientious objection to military service is also

with us, and things are moving in the same direction as they did during the "great war." When the Government brought in the recent Conscription Bill—it would have been too straightforward to have called it by that name—assurances were given by the Prime Minister that every consideration would be given to the Conscientious Objector; he would be in the hands of a special tribunal, and there would be no penalization, either during the silent war that is in being, or after the noisy one that may come. I do not know whether Mr. Chamberlain spoke with his tongue in his cheek, but, while no one regards him as an intellectual genius, one can hardly think of him as so great a fool as to be blind to the fact that no Act of Parliament can make a tribunal impartial, and if these tribunals were as impartial as our high courts of justice, that would not make the general public tolerant concerning men who have declined military service at a time when we are told that our salvation depends upon the strength of the armed forces. The only real way to put conscientious objection on a fair basis, would be, as in the case of vaccination, to make a simple declaration suffice. To make the issue dependent upon the ability of unskilled men to conduct a verbal battle with a tribunal, is quite absurd.

Am I then claiming that any person who says he has an objection to serve in the army should be excused, while others are being conscripted? Not at all. My position is that, in this instance, the logical way is the proper way, and the one that is least free from injustice. Either there should be Conscription for all, from the sons of the King, down to the poorest commoner (a nice word that for a democracy) or there should be complete dependence on the voluntary system. In the last war the Government permitted a plea of conscientious objection to be entered, and then, when the tribunals instead of conceiving their true duty to be that of seeing how many people should be kept out of the army, decided it was their job to see how many could be forced in, those who were excused were upbraided by people and Government, many sent to prison, and in some prisons treated with gross brutality by their keepers. The whole thing worked badly and unjustly in the last war, and it will work badly at any time. Already letters are appearing in the papers denouncing those men who decline the use of arms as a method of settling differences.

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Pro and Con

Now, if the Conscientious Objector rests his case upon the wickedness of war and the belief that no country can benefit from war (I am not concerned with financial profit, material gains in territory, or gains of that description) if it is meant that the military life is relatively a bad one, that war brutalizes those who conquer equally with those who are conquered, I agree with all this. War breeds brutalities, it creates enmities instead of friendships, it fosters

feelings that are as far away as possible from healthy social ones, and it presents the conquerors with a Hitler, a Mussolini, and concentration camps. All this I said in 1914 to 1918 (when war, as war, was more popular because it was less costly in danger and cash) and my opinion on these points has not altered in the slightest. I say now as I said then that the essential question before a country is not always war or peace, (no more dishonest alternative was ever coined than this one for use during the past year) it is often a choice between war and worse than war. The choice before any of us is whether in given circumstances death may not be preferable to life. The coward may prefer to die many deaths. The brave man dies but once.

But it does not follow from this that I agree entirely with the Conscientious Objector, or with his opposite number the militarist. It is most obvious that a member of a nation at war simply cannot stand outside it in a position of neutrality. One cannot escape the dangers to which the rest of the people are exposed, neither can one forego any kind of benefit which victory may bestow. Neither can he avoid helping on the war by any kind of alternative labour he may do. If he is put to any kind of "non-combatant" service he is releasing a man for active military service. If he engages in a form of labour that has no connexion with war, the same result follows. If the cost of living increases he will share it, if the cost of living declines he will share that also. If wages are higher or lower as a consequence of the war, the Conscientious Objector cannot avoid his share in either direction. If he confines himself to growing corn he is feeding the army. No man can cut himself adrift from the social group with which he is living and, in these days, even though he went to another country the same position would exist. No man can completely separate himself from the community to which he belongs.

That, I think, is obvious; and the Greeks, as usual, got there. I fancy it occurs in one of the plays of Aristophanes. Athens is about to go to war with another people, and two Athenian citizens sent to the King of the other country a treaty of peace between him and them. The absurdity, the impossibility, of a number of people standing completely apart from their fellows was never more convincingly shown. But social problems are seldom new ones. They are old ones in a little different situation.

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#### The Reformer's Road

I am not attacking the Conscientious Objector. On the contrary, I have a very high respect for his character. I am not concerned with the man who adopts the position as a cover for something else. Neither do I sympathize with those foolish people who sneer at the Conscientious Objector as being afraid. As things are the courage of the genuine Conscientious Objector is demonstrated in his public declaration. Whether the other man has courage or not he has to prove *after* enlistment. He may have enlisted from fear of public censure, or because he was carried on a wave of popular passion, or for any one of half-a-dozen other reasons. The prospect of being, while the war is on or even when it is imminent, held up to popular admiration, or of being somebody for once in a while, may lead to enlistment. No Conscientious Objector may count upon a Cabinet Minister going to taste his stew to see that it is all right, or to take care that his living-room is furnished with flowers and reading material.

But so far as daring social opinion, or braving the sneers of one's workmates, or one's neighbours, or being held up to opprobrium by the press, goes, to

that extent the Conscientious Objector is giving an earnest of his sincerity and of his courage. And men of that type, whether we are in agreement with them or not, indicate a type of character that society can neglect or suppress only at its peril.

But neither the Conscientious Objector in time of war, nor the heretic or revolutionist in times of peace, may expect the admiration and respect of Society as a whole if he seriously runs against its most cherished opinions or institutions. A well known public character, a Christian, said to me at the end of a long wrangle between myself and a couple of his friends, "What do you think would happen if everyone held the same opinions as yourself?" "Well," I replied, "I think there would be a pretty big 'bust' up, and another antagonistic movement would have to be developed." "But," I went on to say, "There is no need for alarm, Human Society is never likely to be overcome by such an epidemic of intelligence as you are thinking of, and, meanwhile, the need for me is the existence of you, and it is not unknown for the revolutionist of one generation to become the hard-shell conservative of the next." But the reformer, the man who challenges public opinion and "outrages" public feeling must not expect Society as a whole to applaud his conduct. If it tolerates his existence, he must be content. Tributes and admiration will come later—when the challenger is dead.

So I conclude we are not so much on the horns of a dilemma as we are in the presence of an inconsistency. The Conscientious Objector, to use the language of biology, represents a social "sport." He stands as a protest on behalf of individual independence against the coercive quality of the social will. But Society cannot be made up of "sports"; there is a limit to what it will put up with so far as departure from normal conduct and opinion (which is another form of conduct) is concerned. It may submit to the most varied opinions concerning every institution. It may even defend the right of the individual to express those opinions; indeed in the field of opinion the only limit that one need expect and allow for, is our old friend—breach of the public peace. But when Society, through its acknowledged form of government, imposes upon its members certain obligations, those obligations should be common to all. If it asks for volunteers only, we are in another situation. But there is no justification for making a service obligatory, and then saying, but, if any of you do not care for it, you may stand aside.

I think we should all admire the man who stands up for his own personal opinions whatever they may be, and with whatever subject they are concerned. The man who does this, promptly and boldly, stands, as I have already said, upon a much higher level, and, in the case of existing conditions, is actually performing a higher social service—at least one of a more enduring character—than he who rushes to arms, and then returns to civil life with a lot of fantastic and stereotyped absurdities about the fine time he had with the "boys" during the war, and so forth. The latter is doing what he can, quite unconsciously, of course, to moralize all the wrong and brutalities and iniquities that are inseparable from war, however inevitable they may be. But the former is pointing the way towards a higher type of human society. He is calling attention to the fact that just as the real choice may be, or may soon become, the choice between war and worse than war, so the choice the Conscientious Objector has before him is affirming in ways that seem best to him the conviction that of all fields for the discussion of human differences the battle-field is the most indecisive and the most demoralizing. But he must not expect his way to be easy. He can protest, he should

be permitted to protest, because he is in the minority. If he were in the majority (and we were faced by the situation we are faced with to-day) it might well be that there would be a clamour for the suppression of those heretics—the men who wished for war.

CHAPMAN COHEN

## Pietism and Progress

The whole history of civilization is strewn with creeds and institutions which were invaluable at first, and deadly afterwards.—*Bagehot*.

A FAVOURITE argument with preachers of all denominations is that civilization is due to the Christian Religion. The speakers have repeated it so often that some of them actually believe it. They point, triumphantly, to Britain, France, the United States, and other countries, and declare that they are civilized, and that it is all due to the fact that these places are also Christian. Some of the more ignorant Gospellers shout that if it were not for the "Blessed Bible" we should all murder one another. And, then, glancing to see if their hats are still where they left them, they pronounce the benediction, and go home with their share of the collection.

The argument is not a new one, for it is part of the stock-in-trade of the professional sons-of-God. It may not be a perfect argument, but there are no good reasons in defence of Christianity. And a priest must defend his salary, so there you are! It was used by defenders of the Faith a hundred years ago, and it will be used as long as hot-gospellers find preaching is a paying profession. Ingersoll made rare fun of the contention a generation ago. He said that to urge that civilization was due to the Christian Bible, was as valuable as to say that civilization was due to the stove-pipe hat. Wherever there was civilization, there was that hat. Therefore, civilization was due to the stove-pipe hat. Mark Twain was even more critical than Ingersoll. Mark said that the presence of the Holy Bible was not an unmixed good, for soon after an unfortunate native had received the blessing of a copy of God's Word from a missionary, he found that he had got a Bible, but had lost his own home.

It cannot be too often repeated that the clergy, as a class, are not educated. They are only educated in the patter of their own profession, which is not real education at all. To defend a dying creed by the help of dead languages is not education in the modern sense of that word. Nor has the habit of blustering and twisting the truth much educational value. It would be very difficult to find any body of men so entirely ignorant of the culture of their own profession. The average clerk in holy orders is, usually, a petty dictator, and the pulpit is a coward's castle, with no opportunity of reply, a pleasing state of affairs which is taken full advantage of by the clergy. It is a distressing fact that Spurgeon, the most popular preacher of the 19th century, was the advocate of a theology as uncultured as anything that might have come direct from the cotton-fields of Carolina, U.S.A. That it never detracted from his popularity is not a compliment to the education of his numerous hearers and readers. Of all the countless millions of sermons delivered by the Christian clergy only a mere handful are worth any consideration, and even in these cases, this is due to the beauty of the language employed, and not to the antiquated ideas themselves. No handsman can play the same tune for two thousand years without tiring both themselves and their audience. More so, if that tune is no more exhilarating than "the funeral march of a stewed eel."

The argument advanced is that civilization is due to the Christian Religion. Which, as old Euclid says, "is absurd." For there were very many civilizations long before there was any Christianity. And, so far as Europe is concerned, the most backward, the least progressive of the countries, are the most priest-ridden and the most pious. The converse is also true. France is, intellectually speaking, in the very vanguard of progress. There are probably more Freethinkers in France than any other country in the world, and French literature is one blaze of splendid scepticism from the days of Abelard to those of Anatole France. Present-day Britain is not so much antagonistic to, as averse from, Christianity. Only one Briton in nineteen attends a place-of-worship, and this includes the "coals and blankets" brigade which forms a large part of the total. The only thing that keeps the Christian Religion going in Britain is the heavy endowments associated with the various churches. Even the foundations of the State Church are undermined. She still clutches her revenues, but the reverence of the people is everywhere departing from her.

Theology is not progressive. Truth is said to be recorded in certain writings, and, once accepted, these writings are regarded as infallible. Or, maybe, the Church itself is regarded as infallible. The more fanatical the believers, the more reactionary they are bound to become. Too extreme reverence for a sacred book has been one of the causes of the unprogressive character of the Hindoo and Mohammedan peoples. The Abyssinian of the fifth century, clasping his Bible, is in precisely the same position, intellectually and socially, as an Abyssinian of the twentieth century with a Bible. It is surely remarkable that the profession of the Christian Faith, and the spiritual activities of the most ancient of the Christian Churches, should, after so many centuries, have produced so barren a result. Before the Italian priests convert these barbarians to the Church Catholic, the British and Foreign Bible Society had better look to its fading laurels.

The most crushing rejoinder, however, is furnished by Abyssinia, which has enjoyed the benefits of Christianity, such as they are alleged to be, far longer than the majority of European countries. Whilst our British ancestors were painted savages, Abyssinia possessed the glorious Gospel. When Europe was peopled largely by barbarians, Abyssinia had her Coptic Church. If any country should be civilized, intellectual, progressive, humane, it is Ethiopia. But what do we find?

Instead of this traditionally Christian country leading the world in civilization, it was until yesterday a stronghold of slavery, with a priesthood in supreme control, dominating a people who were living lives little removed from that of the primitive Bedouins. The attempts that were made to destroy slavery—before the Italian invasion showed that another Christian people, with the connivance of the oldest of Christian Churches, could outdo the Abyssinians in pillage, and the brutal destruction of women and children—all attempts to destroy slavery in Abyssinia was defeated by the native priesthood brandishing its sacred book in defence of the institution. For nearly twenty centuries Abyssinia had possessed the blessing of the Bible and Christianity. The two combined had not civilized the Abyssinians; that had given the Abyssinians neither enlightenment or civilization. Its fall before the murderous policy of another Christian people merely emphasizes the absurdity of counting "Christianity" and civilization as synonymous terms.

One reason, of course, for Abyssinia's condition is that the country is remote, inaccessible, unattractive.

Intercourse with foreigners was rare, and old, barbarian customs settled down into a terrible stereotype, heavy and unyielding. The reason why Britain is so much more progressive is due to the simple fact that this country has always benefited from the intercourse with foreigners. It is the one thing which has saved us from social and intellectual stagnation, it is the source of our proud position among the nations. Foreigners bring fresh ideas which break down fixed rules and settled customs, which tend to ossify a nation. Every foreigner is, so to speak, a Free-thinker, a living spectacle of an admitted unbelief which, eventually, tends to modify or destroy the old, primitive, social and religious customs. "There's nothing right or wrong, but thinking makes it so." The mass of men think but slowly, the foreigner challenges old custom. This interplay of ideas which makes progress possible, is, in the last analysis, Free-thought.

MIMNERMUS

## The Customs and Culture of the Cassubians

THE economy, language and observances of the surviving remnant of a Slavonic stock, which forms the westernmost section of their race are scientifically studied in a work entitled *The Cassubian Civilization* (Faber, 1935). Eminent authorities have collaborated in this undertaking, and Dr. Malinowski has contributed an instructive preface.

In this, Malinowski notes that the Cassubians, or as the Poles term them, the *Kaszubs* (pronounced Kalshoobs) "are the only living representatives of a body of Slavonic tribes who some ten centuries ago peopled the whole territory of Eastern Germany, as far as the river Elbe. In their language culture and present-day life they are the only remaining specimen of that part of Europe before its Germanization. For, although for centuries the *Kaszubs* have remained in contact with the superior civilization of their Teutonic neighbours . . . they have retained their nationality, that is, the language, customs and domestic organization of their forefathers." Also, an additional interest is afforded by the fact that these communities dwell in the precarious and much discussed Danzig area.

The nefarious partition of old-time Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria, and the harsh despotism of the two former States made Poland become "the cradle of modern European nationalism." Austrian Poland, however, was more humanely administered, as Malinowski, who is himself a Pole, admits. But Austrian authority was weak, and national hatreds strong. We are reminded that: "In Galicia, the Polish majority bullied the Ruthenians; in Bohemia the Germans squabbled with the Czechs; and in the South the Italians with the Tyrolese and Slovenes. In addition, there was the other half of the Dual Monarchy which denationalized its minorities as ruthlessly as is now done in Roumania against the Hungarians themselves." In conclusion, Dr. Malinowski congratulates the Baltic Institute in making possible the publication of the joint researches of German and Polish humanists, whose labours prove that so long as science remains unrestrained by racial prejudice and political pressure, it still serves to further friendly intercourse and aid among the nations.

The Cassubians have long been converted to Christianity, but the influences of an earlier cult persist. Spectral agencies detrimental to children are dreaded, and even the unborn babe is endangered. The preg-

nant mother's likeness must not be taken, or her offspring will be unprepossessing in appearance. If she glanced at a squirrel the infant would be red-haired like the treacherous Judas. A rosary or scapular is suspended from the child's neck to protect it from goblins. Many other superstitions are associated with childhood until its period terminates with the taking of the sacrament and release from school.

Although the disinterested character of love and matrimony is acclaimed in Cassubian songs, mercenary motives are not only present, but usually predominate in marriage. Very rarely indeed does wealth unite with poverty. Before and during Advent the prospective bridegroom attends church on Sundays to survey the bevy of beauty at its devotions, but he almost invariably selects a partner of his own social and economic standing, for his parents would refuse to recognize any other engagement.

When death takes place the mirror is covered with a cloth and the house-clock is stopped. The dead person's eyes are closed and his body is sprinkled with holy water. Dr. Lorentz states that: "If the deceased was a farmer, it was his son's duty to announce his death to all domestic animals, including the bees, and in some places even the fruit trees." Then the dead man is attired in his best clothing and placed in the coffin. Presumably for service in the spirit realm, it was customary with the Protestant Cassubians to provide the corpse with a hymn book, a coin, some treasured object and even a few feathers of the domesticated fowls. Despite the solemnity of the occasion, the burial was succeeded by a jovial repast at an inn which frequently became as hilarious and noisy as a wedding festivity.

Meredith's country merry-making on the green is now a memory. The traditional pastimes—the games, the spinning parties and processions of lads and lasses in the bright summer sunshine, the *al fresco* songs and dances are no more. The saturnine clergy frowned on the sometimes too convivial character of these amusements and brought about their suppression. This was tolerated for a time, but at last the people rose in rebellion and the old-time entertainments were partly restored in the village inns where mine host directed the proceedings. Sports' Clubs also minister to the needs of the populace and serve to counteract the seductive enticements of the tavern.

The Cassubian Christmas customs are mere variants of those once universal in rural Europe. The belief that the farm stock are endowed with the power of speech on Christmas-night is met with in rustic circles in England. On May-Day eve, when, after their journey thither on broomsticks and he-goats, the witches assemble at Blocksberg, it was customary until 1870 to protect the stables and homesteads, as well as their inmates, by inscribing crosses on, and thrusting nails or thorns, into the doors. Also, a small pine tree decorated with ribbons was paraded by a party of singing children bidding winter adieu and welcoming summer sunshine.

The fisher-folk and peasantry linger in medieval twilight. As Dr. Fischer intimates: "The Cassubians, both of the Protestant and Catholic districts are devout Christians, who regard the Church with infinite awe and give implicit belief to all her teachings. But these teachings leave many of his daily questions unanswered and the Cassubian is sceptical of all explanations offered by science. With the help of his imagination he constructs his theory of the world." He cannot conceive the earth as a sphere, despite his school instruction, and pictures the globe as a huge disk supporting the sky above which is the abode of God. Through the heavenly windows the angels survey mankind. The sparkling stars reflect

the splendour of the divine throne. Beneath the earth lies hell, where the devils dwell in darkness and despair. In this rude cosmology the solar orb travels round our planet. Within the sun Christ reigns in all his glory, and on Easter Day the Cross and the Lamb of God become visible in the sky.

Traces of earlier lunar worship survive. Adam and Eve now dwell in the moon, and when one bows three times and wishes for favours at the first appearance of her crescent, this desire will be fulfilled. The moon is credited with weather control, and when she is waxing the soil is prepared and planted, but her waning is chosen as the time for removing dirt by scouring or ablation. But the reverse occurs in the case of children, for those born when the silver orb is approaching its full splendour become weakly and effeminate, while those that arrive during the moon's declining stage develop into vigorous maturity. Very similar superstitions exist in England, and the belief is still entertained in the Midlands and elsewhere that the fat of bacon from a pig killed in the waning of the moon runs to waste.

Every Cassubian has his attendant star until death. Flashes of lightning are discharged by God and the heavenly hosts; the angels produce the electric display when they are assailing evil spirits. Those who are unfortunate enough to be killed by lightning become the devil's property. The marked variations in the weather of different years is explained by the circumstance that the Deity entrusts its administration to discordant saints for each coming season. Again, as his Satanic Majesty likes to lurk in the shadow of trees, this is the reason why so many of these are smitten by lightning.

The hazel, however, is spared because it sheltered Mary and the infant Jesus when they fled to Egypt, while the hawthorn owes its safety to the fact that the Redeemer's Crown of Thorns was made from its branches. The thistle and the nettle, on the other hand, presumably because they began to grow after the fall in Eden, are the perquisites of Satan. According to one legend, the aspen trembles since it became alarmed when the Holy Family sheltered beneath it when it escaped from Herod. Others assert that the aspen's ceaseless tremor was imposed as a punishment for its stubborn refusal to mourn in company with all the other trees at the Saviour's crucifixion.

Cassubian folk-lore concerning animals resembles that of other communities, and such an old wives' tale as that which alleges that the Devil can assume any animal shape, save that of a lamb, has been widespread in Britain itself. As with many of our own peasantry, the swallow and the lark are God's birds. The cuckoo in Cassubia is an impious creature whose unceasing calling served to attract the attention of the pursuers of the fugitive family when journeying to Egypt. Cats and owls are commonly the willing servitors of witches, and are apt to be mistrusted accordingly.

Certain people are supposed to possess second sight and foretell future events: especially the time of death. But those endowed with the sinister influence of the evil eye are most to be dreaded. "The evil eye," it is said, "is dangerous even to its owner, for if he looks at his cattle without taking precautions, he bewitches them."

Like tribes of the lower culture, whose baleful beliefs Christian missionaries are anxious to dispel, the devout Cassubians ascribe supernatural powers to certain people. Such potencies sometimes benefit, but usually injure the community. They are either inborn or have been obtained through a covenant with the Lord of Hell. Involuntary supernatural powers include the succuba or *mora* who is invariably a girl, and, in a family of seven girls and no boy, the

eldest or youngest is inevitably a *mora*. A *mora* assumes various forms, including those of dogs and cats, and may invade a household through a key-hole, or down a chimney. She steals towards her sleeping victim and nearly strangles him, but when he awakens she retreats. When a *mora* vows vengeance on a faithless lover she repeatedly imbibes his blood until he expires.

A *mora's* malevolence may be prevented by covering the key-hole, inscribing a cross on the door, or placing a knife under the pillow. The *mora* usually indulges in her depredations at early morn or midnight, and her favourite victims are females recently confined or elderly matrons. When restless spirits of the dead act as *moras*, the only remedy available is to redeem them by means of prayer and masses for their unsanctified souls.

Vampires, witches and other dealers in the dark arts are deeply dreaded, and even now the Courts decide actions for slander brought by those accused of spell-binding. Certain villages are stigmatized as witches' habitations, and one must provide oneself with antidotes when entering such accursed haunts. Consecrated objects, a garment turned inside out, or an alder cudgel carried in the hand, all serve to disarm the malignant powers.

These examples of primitive superstition might be multiplied many times from Cassubian folk-lore. That a European community still entertains such fantasies recalls the warning remark of Sir James Frazer concerning the very thin partition that divides modern enlightenment from the baleful darkness of savage irrationalism.

T. F. PALMER

### "How It strikes a Contemporary"

SOME anonymous person—evidently inspired by some published writing of mine to believe I was a possible convert—lately sent me a copy of the *Freethinker*. Frankly, I found it reasonable, and repaired to Messrs. W. H. Smith & Sons' bookstalls for a second meal. Alas! the journal was not to be had at such places. But not because Messrs. Smith refused to corrupt me for pelf, since it was explained that I could have it if I "gave a special order weekly." As a clerk suggested it was "not the sort of paper to have about," I thought this an amusing method of seeking to serve both God and Mammon.

However I procured my second copy. The contents impressed me sufficiently to make me desire to communicate my impressions, especially as it seemed to me that "the other side" was too little represented in the paper. Even Mercutio's side—you will remember that he called for "a plague on both your houses" of Capulet and Montagu—seemed not to be represented. And are not very many of us to-day in Mercutio's position—neither declared Atheists nor declared religionists? Not even Agnostics; the great unclassified, who from mental inertia or unwillingness to face an issue instinctively felt to be the profoundest of all, have never faced the fundamental challenge of God or no-God? Or if we have temporarily faced it—never reached a permanent conclusion?

I dislike to classify myself under any flag at this moment. I am (I hope) an enquirer: a sort of Nicodemus, but in the daylight. I am interested and deeply concerned as any thoughtful person must be. As a barrister I am accustomed to weighing cases, and I know how dangerous it is to hear one side only. Therefore the *Freethinker* ought to be read by me. Also by every religious person. Equally secularists should read the religious case. I cannot help think-

ing that both sides read too little of each other from what I have observed of both—and what they do read is read for the sake of confutation rather for balanced and impartial consideration. Am I unjust? Anyhow the Atheist side clearly is better acquainted with the religious side than vice-versa: Atheists do not cherish the ridiculous idea that it is a sin or a fearful temptation to read the other side.

If I assume the mantle of impartiality, I must confess that both sides can put up a strong case. But are men on this question, convinced by reason and argument entirely? May it not be that most or all of us (as Gilbert pleasantly fabled that we are all *born* Liberals or Tories) are born with a bent to Animism or Materialism, that is to say, born believers in God or disbelievers in God? There may be a substratum of reality in that horrible Calvinistic doctrine of predestination after all. For my part, I think I must have a "born" religious mind. As a young and imaginative child I believed that a pair of red slippers and a lighted candle were alive. I feel certain that, left to myself my child-mind would have invented a god or gods. Many child-minds would—and the "naturalness" or religion may be some argument for believers. To the unimaginative mind, this will be mere foolishness.

And you who proudly call yourself Freethinkers (a noble title indeed) is your human mind really free? Is not the very finest mind—even a Shakespeare's, for example—bondslave to its inherited temperament (not to speak of its acquired bias, its accretions of prejudice, obsession and environmental thought)? Certainly no ordinary mind can be free in its thought? If I may, for a moment, be personal without offence I should say that Chapman Cohen (as far as I have read him) has a mind entirely harnessed and bound to the cause of secularism. Whether it is the better or the worse for that is beside my point for the moment: the point is that it is no more "free" than the Pope's mind or the Archbishop of Canterbury's mind. My mind or the mind of the average man in the street may be freer. But they are not completely "free" either.

It strikes one as strange, at first sight, that unbelief should be militant, and try to make converts to its negation. But, of course, it is not strange really. For, regarding religion as superstition and error, the unbeliever feels the desire to liberate men's minds from a bondage which he must regard as harmful. Obviously the proselytizing unbeliever labours under a great difficulty—a greater difficulty than his opposite number—in urging adherence to an unestablished negative against an ancient well-established positive. To make the secularist's task harder, his effort merely to discuss his case is crabbled by laws against "blasphemy," and by the sincere but misguided efforts of deeply religious folk to represent such discussion as wrong in itself—a "sin" in short—and to surround such discussion with an atmosphere of horror and wickedness. This seems to me quite invalid, and indeed, monstrous. If Christ and St. Paul could discuss unbelief, why should their followers be more squeamish? Unbelievers should have the entire freedom of religionists to proclaim their unfaith and to discuss or proselytize; and as a lawyer, I would only fetter them to the same extent as religionists, namely that in so doing they must not "provoke a breach of the peace" by ordinary reasonable citizens. It seems to me that if I were the most fanatical of Christians or churchmen, I could not abandon this position. The right to self-defence seems to me inalienable, and I would permit either Satan or Judas to state his case as freely as the greatest saint that ever lived.

Parts of the *Freethinker* I found very readable, but

essentially trifling. (Matters of importance are frequently dull.) But such topics as the worldliness of the clergy, the corruptions and the paltrinesses of religion—legitimate Aunt Sallies I daresay—do not seem to me of the first importance. I daresay if Secularism were as widespread and as wealthy and well-organized as religion, similar matters could be written of secularists. Let us get down to the root of the matter: which is "Is there a God of any kind at all?" Take away the Church and the Bible and put a baby on a desert island, and as he grew up would he not pose that question to himself, and would he not answer it somehow? If I had been that baby I think my answer would have become in favour of God-existence.

Atavism, perhaps—who knows? The inherited fears and bogies of primitive ancestors stirring in the sub-conscious mind that gropes in bewilderment before the phenomena of life. It may be. Or is it something implanted, a Wordsworthian "intimation of immortality" that is the seed of all the thousand religions (good or bad) that man has evolved? Who knows?

In reading my *Freethinker* I could not help reflecting that the good of religion was ignored—a fatal error in opposition it seems to me. For when I look at Salisbury Cathedral or when I read Milton's sonnet *On His Blindness*, I am awed by the stupendous achievements of man's religion. Will unfaith ever give us monuments in architecture or literature equal to these of man's faith? If it was a myth that created such architecture or such literature, I feel that a myth is justified. Personally I have always preferred fiction when it is first-rate, to fact when it is third-rate, and I will always prefer Stendal's *Rouge et Noir* to any "true" murder story in the *News of the World*.

Man does not live by bread alone, and certainly religion is neither to be made nor demolished, by argument alone. Man is an emotional animal governed by his feelings far more than by his reason. The appeal of religion is largely to the emotions, but the *Freethinker* says little to make any counter-emotional appeal to-day, though I fancy the strength of Bradlaugh largely consisted in his ability to provoke emotional reactions as well as to provoke thought.

I hope regular readers of the *Freethinker* may be interested in the impact that a perusal of their paper makes upon an outsider; one who may fairly be described, I think, as an ordinary person with a reasonable mind.

C. G. L. DU CANN

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### Faux Pas

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CHERUBIM and seraphim  
 Busy were in praising Him  
 Who Sits Upon The Throne;  
 "Holy, Holy," cherubs cry,  
 "Hosanna," seraphim reply,  
 "Amen," the saints intone;  
 But when a German shouted "Heil,"  
 The Lord could not repress a smile.

B.S.

---

Were half the power that fills the world with terror,  
 Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,  
 Given to redeem the human mind from error,  
 There were no need of arsenals nor forts.

Longfellow

## Acid Drops

It is some time since we said that in view of the opposition in this country to any kind of agreement with "godless Russia," and the shilly-shallying of our Government in coming to an agreement with the Soviet, Russia might, as its movement was towards the East, leave Europe to stew in its own juice. If the news just to hand of a non-aggression pact between Russia and Germany is true, that danger has materialized. It will also lead to Hitler's securing a still further hold over Europe than was given him in the semi-secret conclave of Munich last September, and maintaining a professed friendship with this country until he is able to attack with safety. Hitler's English "fifth column" has served him well, and he may reward them on the occasion of his 1940 birthday party.

Nothing irritates a dictator so much as the free expression of opinion. He knows that it is the one thing against which mere force is ineffective—unless one can be quite sure that it is not merely stamped out in its written form, but that it is also forgotten. So one is not surprised to learn that in Italy a new list of banned books includes, among others, the writings of Voltaire, Balzac, Edgar Wallace, George Sand, Edgar Allen Poe, H. G. Wells, and, above all, Machiavelli. The last is surprising, because Mussolini has always boasted that he derived most of his main ideas from the great Italian author, who, by the way, has not always been treated fairly by his critics. We are quite ready to believe that Mussolini has read Machiavelli, although he did not get his loud-mouthed bombast from him, but Mussolini has evidently read. On the other hand it is quite clear that his brother dictator, Hitler, has not read anything. He is an ignorant man from beginning to end. We should not be surprised to learn that he has never even read through *Mein Kampf*, which is said to have been written mainly by Hesse. It is at least clear that someone reduced his ravings to order.

There is still much talk in interested circles in this country about patching up peace with Hitler's Germany, and, indeed, if it is possible, to continue the present armistice for a little longer. But no amount of patching up can bring a lasting peace with Nazism, since by its very nature Nazism is bound to be at war with every State that does not fall into line with it. When it talks of non-Nazi powers carrying on a policy of encirclement, and the other powers deny any such aim, it is the Nazis who are in the right, and the so-called democracies that are in the wrong. For, as we have before pointed out, Germany, like Italy, dreads more than anything else the impact of antagonistic ideas. Its own people it might, in the course of a couple of generations, reduce largely to a mass of unintelligent brutes by a process of elimination and careful breeding. But every State outside Germany that is not built upon a similar pattern to itself is a constant threat, and it is the war of ideas that it dreads most. This danger is not removed by partial conquest, for the more Nazism advances—geographically—the greater the contact with antagonistic forces, and the more it must strive for domination.

In other words, the German gangsters have actually a much better intellectual grasp of the situation than have most of our own leaders. Their mouthing of a desire to live in peace with Germany, and a willingness to co-operate with Hitler in a peace policy is an exhibition of either hypocrisy, or of almost unbelievable foolishness. If Germany brings itself into line with a genuinely peaceful policy it is likely to break down before an internal upheaval. If it tries to perpetuate itself it can only do so by its continuing a policy of European conquest at its lowest, and of world conquest in its fullest expression. The plots that Germany is carrying on against America—North and South—its open propaganda in this country and elsewhere, prove that the Nazi leaders recognize that what we have just said is correct. It is indeed so obvious that it is difficult to believe that our own political leaders do not recognize its truth. Germany must conquer or collapse.

The Rev. F. J. Miles is Secretary to an organization which prays for the reconversion of Russia to Christianity. Recently Mr. Miles told an audience that "during the last sixteen years . . . over 200,000 prayers have been handed in . . . to be laid before the Lord who answers prayers." The situation needs clarifying. By whom were the prayers received? What method was taken to pass them on to the Lord? How does Mr. Miles know that the Lord has not tried to convert Russia, and Russia will not be converted? And in that case may not the Lord hand over some sort of an awful wallop to Mr. Miles for so publicly displaying his weakness at a time when it is more than ever necessary to manifest his power on earth?

An Act of God has done great damage to the Roman Catholic presbytery at Visale, near Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. One of God's earthquakes has left the Church in danger of collapse.

From the *Christian World* we get the remarkable information that it is religion that has given us both the actual word holiday and the great fixed public holidays—Sunday, Christmas, Easter and Whitsun, and probably the humane idea of holidays at all is a fruit of the Christian spirit. This news comes from the Rev. W. D. Langridge, who must be a peculiarly ill-informed person, even for the pulpit. There was a day of the Sun, dedicated to the Sun-god, there was the day given to the birth of a saviour, and the rest of the holy days mentioned existed long before the nightmare of Christianity was ever heard of. Holiday, is after all, only holy-day, that is taboo day, a day on which certain things *must* be done or not done. We are a bit surprised at the *Christian World* printing such unadulterated rubbish.

There is one of the Bank Holidays that is free from religious associations and that is August Bank Holiday. So God sent his lightning on that day and tumbled the cross off St. Saviour's Church, Leeds. The moral is plain. God is annoyed at the people holidaying on a day that has no relish of salvation in it. God was so particular in the big war not to damage the crosses and religious statuary on the cathedrals of France, that his failure to do so in this case gives a peculiar significance to his act. We think it plainly registers the divine discontent with the purely secular activities of Sir John Lubbock who looked upon a people's holiday as a good thing in itself.

Some of our Members of Parliament are, like our policemen, "wonderful." Here is Mr. Stokes, M.P. for Ipswich, who propounds, in a letter to the *Star*, what he calls "a practical method of invoking justice" among the nations. He would invite Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and Daladier to review their problems together, and then "Great Britain, as leader of the world" should take the initiative in calling the meeting. Mr. Stokes doesn't appear to realize that it is just this claim of leadership, set up here and there, that lies at the root of the trouble. Each of these national leaders are quite ready to lead the other, when what is really needed is something in the nature of an international court that should be above acting as "leader," and should perform the function of a judge. Europe had its great chance in the League of Nations, but that was thrown away when the old political gangs were put into power, when the only thing in common was the mutual distrust that existed, and the determination of each to profit at the expense of the other.

But Mr. Stokes' crowning absurdity is that there should be "a general realization that the application of Christian teaching" would bring about the desired result. Bless the man's stupidity. He doesn't appear to realize that for over fifteen centuries Christians have been quarrelling among themselves as to what is the meaning of Christian teaching, and more blood has been shed, more wars waged, over this than any other single cause. Could no other job be found for Mr. Stokes than that of a Member of Parliament?

Mr. Stokes should first try out his statesmanship nearer home. Is he not aware that in his own constituency there are many suffering undue hardship under the Tithe Act? Let Mr. F. R. Allen of Canterbury point out a way the Member for Ipswich could move with better effect. Mr. Allen writes:—

It is quite arguable that no one should be compelled to pay anything in the name of tithe, but assuming that something has to be paid by somebody, then the question is whether a person has any titheable produce on titheable land. Tithe was a tenth of such produce. If there was no titheable produce on the titheable land, there was no tithe for anybody. Moreover, tithe obviously could not be "compulsorily redeemed"; it was not a liability of the landowner as such; and houses, among other things, were not titheable of common right.

In plain language, Christian teaching which Mr. Stokes invokes, maintains blackmail and the accumulation of money obtained under false pretences. What else can we term the persecution of alleged "tithe-holders," whose tithes were eaten up by the parsonry ages ago? Surely this is the only instance ever recorded where the law permits demands for monies representing a commodity that does not exist?

There is an opportunity for anyone who wishes to acquire it of owning a "splinter" of the crown of thorns worn by Jesus. It is owned by an Italian woman, and the piece of the crown was certified by Cardinal Vincentio Mazerotti in 1882. The owner of the thorn asks £100 for it.

Of course this is not the only remnant of the crown of thorns. The crown was "miraculously" discovered, no one is sure how or when, or how it was known to be the real thing. Probably it was tried on someone suffering from scurvy or brain disease, and the person immediately jumped up cured. There were, and are, so far as we know, over one hundred churches that claimed to have pieces of the true thorn, and a much larger number that claimed to have similar relics. The confidence trick as practised in modern London is a very pale imitation of the thing as worked by the Church of Rome.

But the relics of the Crown of Thorns pale before the relics of the Cross. This was originally dug up near the scene of the execution, along with other things. That it was the true cross was decided in the usual way—it worked a miracle. Then came the grand share-out. Bits were distributed in all directions. Most pieces of wood would soon have been used up. But St. Paulinus says that as pieces were cut from the cross fresh wood grew, and Cyril of Jerusalem says that pieces of the true cross were spread all over the earth. Calvin said that fifty men would not have been able to carry the wood, and Luther said there was enough of the wood to build an immense house.

The Lord looked after his own, and there was discovered, as the trade developed, pieces of the grave clothes in which Jesus was wrapped, some of the nails that held him on the cross, the reed that was placed in his hands, the sponge used by the soldier, the robe in which he was clothed, the spear that pierced his side, the sponge that was held up to him, the post on which he was scourged, etc. The only thing that does not appear to have been preserved was a bottle of the darkness that overspread the land, one of the seven devils cast out of the woman that was brought before him, and the hee-haw of the Ass on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem. No wonder some Christian apologists say still that no other event is so well proven as the existence of Jesus Christ. Many of the relics are still to be seen in continental churches.

A writer in the New Zealand *The Rationalist* points out that in accordance with the four ancient statutes in force in New South Wales it is lawful for one to play football on Sunday so long as he plays within the parish in which he resides; all rationalist meetings on Sunday must be opened by prayer; and a bricklayer may work

at shoemaking on Sunday but not at bricklaying. The conclusion the writer comes to is that these statutes should be scrapped. There are many foolish anomalies in English Sabbatarian Law, and the conclusion is the same.

The glorification of doubt is indulged in, in strange places. We need only quote from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*:—

When Thomas first the glad tidings heard  
That they had seen the risen Lord  
He doubted the Disciples' word—  
Alleluia!

The Rev. Bernard Whelan is a priest of the Church of St. Thomas More, in St. John's Wood, London, and he had a field-day on August 16. A large number of dogs—pekies, chows, Scotties, salukis, dachshunds, etc.—attended church that day to receive his blessing. Father Bernard recited a short blessing at the entrance to the church, first in Latin and then in English. Then he sprinkled the dogs with holy water, and a chorus of barking began. The dogs at any rate did voice a protest, whilst Mary, the champion Scottie from Bolton is reported to have been "bored stiff." Readers who keep "case books" illustrative of human degradation can do worse than insert therein the picture appearing in the *Star* of that day. On it they will see a divinely "called" *homo sapiens* performing the "blessing." The dogs, of course, did not attend of their own "free will."

The *Christian World* reminds its readers of the many virtues possessed by the late Rev. R. F. Horton, who is stated to have "cared much for theology but more for religion," which is much the same as saying that he cared much for astronomy but more for star-gazing. The *Christian World* omits to remind its readers that Horton once convulsed a University audience by saying that he and his followers had decided "to wear nothing to distinguish themselves from ordinary people." By a wicked accident a newspaper report inserted a comma between "nothing" and "to," and it read as if Horton had started a nudist group. We also recall the fact that Horton, besides backing up many other absurd things, was a warm supporter of the war-time imposture, the Mons Angels. He jumped at that silly story with the eagerness of hungry fish jumping at bait, and with as great a display of intelligence.

Father A. L. Poole (Anglican), has announced that in his parish (West Kensington) the majority "would rather collect the morning milk at lunch time than get up to go to Church." This looks as though Father Poole's parishioners have a little more common sense than their pastor. But Father Poole is a determined man, so he has announced that in the future he will not baptize any children whose parents are not communicants of the church, or who do not attend Church regularly. But if they will come to him twice a week for "simple religious instruction" for two or three months, he will forgive them and baptize the child. Nothing could be more reasonable—in an absurd situation.

### Fifty Years Ago

AMONG the Arabs of the Soudan there is an implicit belief in the primitive idea of inspiration. The deity speaks through the dervishes, and the Mahdi, without question, utters the authentic oracles of God. Similarly, the ancient Jews, who were a branch of the same Semitic stem, and in very much the same stage of religious culture, looked to their prophets as mouthpieces of Jahveh. The contention is absurd that this view of inspiration grew up after the time of Ezra. It only became systematized and retrospective. Inspiration ceased to be current simply because a well-organized theocracy set its face against unlicensed traders.

*The Freethinker*, August 25, 1889

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FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FREETHINKER Endowment Trust.—E. Williams, 2s. 6d.

FRED C. HOLDEN.—Thanks for your letter; kind wishes heartily reciprocated.

F. H. E. HARTFITT.—We pointed out that anyone joining the Army has the right to affirm, instead of taking an oath, and also to have his statement concerning religion put down exactly as he gives. We are not concerned with pointing this out to all who do not know it; but the information is there if they will read it. With regard to your statement that no one suffers from being excused Church Parade. This is contradicted by the experience of soldiers themselves. During the war dish-washing and latrine-cleaning were common jobs allotted these soldiers who did not attend Church Parade. The question of Jews is another matter. They had a religion, and were, so far, within the privileged circle.

"GAMMA."—We had in mind when writing the relation of the State to religious belief. We do not think that the example of Charlemagne can be taken as more than a temporary order applied to a special occasion. Certainly so far as this country is concerned the legal position appears to have been as stated.

FOR Circulating and Advertising the *Freethinker*.—J. Lauder, £1.

D. MATTHEWS.—A copy of Professor Oesterreich's *Possession* is being sent. As we have already said, it is a genuinely good piece of work, and we flatter ourselves that we know when a book is worth reading.

F. HOLDEN.—Very pleased to hear from one who listened to us forty years ago. We note your description of us as one who "can use the whip and make his opponent like it." All we can say that in fifty years we have never, we think, aimed at hurting an opponent who was honest in his opposition, no matter how stupid the opposition was. Will think over the other matter, but we have dealt with the subject on several occasions. Will send specimens to the person named.

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

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.

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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

In another part of this issue of the *Freethinker* we print an article by one who has only lately made acquaintance with us. We print it for several reasons. Because it is a thoughtful presentation of the impressions of a newcomer, and as such is interesting in itself, also because it illustrates what one may well call inevitable misconceptions of those who are not familiar

with the modern Freethought position. We would have replied to it in this issue, but in that case some might have read our reply before reading the article with which we are dealing, and so have been unconsciously prejudiced against the position taken up by Mr. Du Cann. We shall reply next week, and our readers will be able to consider the subject in the meantime.

There is a third reason for our publishing the article, although by itself that would not have been sufficient for publicity. This is that it illustrates the value of the help so many of our friends give in passing a copy of the paper to those whom they think may become subscribers. We have never been able to do much in the way of advertising, and the circulation of the paper has been built up by personal recommendation. But we are certain there is a paying circulation to be acquired if only we could get into touch with even a percentage of those who would gladly welcome an introduction to a journal which even in the annals of Freethought is distinctive.

A correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* calls attention to the fact that August 20 was called, by Sir Ronald Ross, "Mosquito Day," because it marked the date at which he took his first decisive step in the determination of the cause of Malaria, and so marked the initiation of methods that in commercial value alone might be expressed in tens of millions. Nevertheless, as the writer of the letter, Mr. R. L. Megros, points out, Ross died a disappointed man because necessary funds had not been forthcoming to develop his discovery as it should have been developed. Of course, if the discovery of Ross had been something in the nature of a new explosive or more deadly gun that would have taken life, there would have been no shortage of cash to develop it to its fullest extent. But it was something that primarily had to do with preserving life, and that made a deal of difference.

One other thing is worth noting. Ross died a very poor man. More than that he lived a poor man. In spite of all he persisted in his researches with a courage and a steadfastness that, again might, had it been expended in war, have led to national fame and monuments erected to his memory. He displayed a courage so much above that of the courage that is made the subject of story and song that the ordinary man or woman—by which we do not mean only people of lowly estate or starvation incomes—simply cannot realize its existence. And Ross's heroism and value is duplicated in scores of scientific laboratories and in thousands of lives. When we learn to assess this kind of courage and devotion to the pursuit of knowledge we shall have developed a type of character and of national idealism that will show the tawdry and comparatively worthless standard of value that we have to-day in its true courage. It will not be surprising if the historian of that date marks the twentieth century as the era in which savagery reached its highest mark.

Mr. G. Whitehead will be in Birkenhead for the fortnight commencing Saturday, August 26, and details for the first week will be found in the Lecture Notices column. The local N.S.S. Branch has a good record of useful work accomplished, and all Freethinkers within easy reach of the meetings to be held during the next fortnight should make a point of attending. Pioneer Press literature will be on sale or may be ordered at all meetings.

We are pleased to learn that with the co-operation of a member of the West London Branch some very successful open-air meetings were recently held in Portsmouth. There is now an attempt being made to found a Branch of the N.S.S. in Portsmouth. We feel sure there are enough Freethinkers in Portsmouth and District to form a very strong Branch. Those interested will please communicate with Mr. A. W. Scott, 35 Lyne Road, Portsmouth.

## Some Bible Studies

### III.

AMONG the extremely interesting finds which excavations in the East have disclosed are the Tell El Amarna Tablets, and the Ras Shamra Tablets. As both sets are being used to show that the Bible is true, it will prove, I think, interesting to go into their contents a little closely. That both these discoveries have let a flood of light on Old Testament history is undeniable; but it seems to a layman like myself that the facts must prove extremely disconcerting for both Jews and Christians.

Take first the Tell El Amarna Tablets. Incidentally some authorities spell the first word with one "I," but no doubt difficulties in putting into English native sounds will account for this. But it is amusing to find how the various authorities are uncertain as to the date of their discovery. Sir Charles Marston, in *The Bible is True* gives it as 1888, and says that an old woman found them. Dr. Naville in his *Schweich Lecture, 1915*, gives the same date, but declares that they were discovered by fellaheen. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* and other encyclopedias give the date as 1887. Professor Breasted, in his *History of Egypt*, gives 1885, while Prof. Flinders Petrie, in his *Egypt and Syria*, written in 1898, says "a few years ago." Here then in our own generation it is not easy to find out an exact date from various authorities who surely ought to know; yet dates are quite confidently given for events—some of them "miraculous"—which are supposed to have taken place thousands of years before the present era to show that the Bible is true.

These Tell El Amarna Tablets were found in a box on the site of the old city of that name on the Nile, and they were hawked round to various authorities during which time many were broken, damaged, or lost, before they were recognized as an almost priceless find. They proved to be, as Dr. Naville states, "part of the archives of the Kings Amenophis III. and IV. [or Amenhetip III. and IV., as Sir Charles Marston spells their names], and their correspondence with the Kings of Asia, and also with the Governors of the cities of Palestine under Egyptian dominion." The tablets really represent a sort of S.O.S., to the Egyptian Kings from their Governors to come and help them defeat an invading enemy in Palestine; and as their dates have been reckoned to be about 1370-1366 B.C., they belong to the eighteenth dynasty, to the time, says Naville, "when the Israelites were in Egypt"—if ever they were, that is. Most of them are written in Babylonian cuneiform, which has been deciphered, but others are written in an unknown tongue.

The dates given above are "approximate" ones—which can mean anything. As a matter of fact the Israelites, according to the orthodox calculations, were already in Palestine then; they had swept the country with fire and sword under Joshua, who died 1426 B.C. Actually 1370-1366 was the period of the judge Othniel, and it is important to note this fact for one of the letters asking for help was from Abdkiba, King of Jerusalem, in which he mentions that the "Habiru" are occupying "the King's cities." Who were these Habiru? Obviously, we are told, they must be the "Hebrews," and obviously also if they were, something has gone wrong with Bible chronology—for according to the Bible, the Hebrews were already in Palestine, and had occupied the land for nearly a century. On the other hand, the dates given to the tablets may be wrong, for how can God's Word err? But not only was there a "Pagan" King in Jerusalem, but that city was already of considerable importance at the time when the tablets were written.

Prof. Petrie, in fact, makes a point of this, and insists that "it was not merely a Jebusite village made into a capital by David and Solomon, but was the capital of South Palestine from early times." Thus the Tell El Amarna Tablets on that point at least prove that the Bible is *not* true.

Whether the Habiru are the Israelites of the Bible under a name which is the same as Hebrew is a debatable point. Abram was called a Hebrew, Joseph said he was stolen from the land of the Hebrews, his brothers were called Hebrews, the daughter of Pharaoh called the babe Moses a child of the Hebrews, God is called the God of the Hebrews—and I think that exhausts the number of times the word is used in the Old Testament. But according to the tablets the Habiru were a pretty hefty army in league with the Hittites, and there is nothing to suggest that they had been slaves in Egypt first. According to the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, the word Hebrew is a transcription of the Aramaic "ebraia" which is the equivalent of the Old Testament word "ibri"; but how the Israelites came to be called Hebrews is a puzzle to the writer of the article in that work—unless these "Habiru" really were the invading Israelites. The truth is no one knows; but as there can be no doubt that Palestine was invaded, and as excavations have not proved in the least degree the story of the Exodus, Bible believers are ready to clutch at anything which will give the Bible story the slightest confirmation. Thus Sir Charles Marston, in *The Bible is True*, points out triumphantly that the tablets actually mention Joshua, and, confirming, in this way, the Bible, confound the infidels. This is the passage referred to:—

As the king my lord liveth, as the king my lord liveth, Aiah is not in Pella. For two months he has been in hiding. Ask then Benenima, ask then Taduia, ask then Jashuia.

One can sense with what a little shout of joy Sir Charles quotes these words, for it seems that other Bible heroes also appear in them. Sir Charles tells us that Aiah is Job. Benenima is Benjamin, and Jashuia is, of course, our old friend Joshua. We are not told how it comes that Job, Benjamin, and Joshua on this showing are all living at the same time; but that is a small matter for a credulity which can believe anything.

In *The Bible is True* is a quotation from Dr. Langdon's *Semitic Mythology*, which mentions the Habirus of the Tell El Amarna Tablets—and it is supposed to confirm everything about these people being the veritable Israelites. It is, in fact, quoted for that particular purpose. Dr. Langdon says there is no doubt about it, and adds, "Accepting this thesis, the Hebrews had served for six centuries as mercenary soldiers and traders among the Babylonians, Assyrians, etc., . . . before they entered and occupied Canaan." If this means anything at all, it means that there were Hebrews before Abraham, and that it was a different horde of Hebrews who invaded Canaan from those in the Bible story. How such a quotation can confirm the latter is quite beyond my comprehension—especially as Sir Charles calmly adds that "there is no mistake about it, the Israelites were Hebrews, not traders such as the Phœnicians, nor soldiers like the Hyksos, but devoted to more pastoral pursuits; and only now emerging from the desert, and only assuming the garb of war for the invasion of their Promised Land." If there is any sense in all this rigmarole, I should like it pointed out to me.

As I have said, there can be no doubt whatever that Canaan was invaded, for these tablets make it perfectly clear; but they do not give one scrap of confirmation of the Bible story. Indeed what they show is that the Bible is *not* true; just as they show that

whatever was the language spoken by the Habiru, or the Hebrews, or the Israelites, the language of Canaan must have been the language of the Tell El Amarna Tablets—that is, Babylonian cuneiform, which was, in addition, understood in Egypt. What those tablets which were destroyed might have contained, we shall unfortunately never know; but that the names of Moses, his generals, and spies, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, are not mentioned in those which survived, can be seen in the list of names given by Petrie at the end of his book.

The Ras Shamra tablets, some of which were discovered in 1929 are, however, of much greater interest—especially to Freethinkers. For people like Sir Charles Marston, they are proof that the Bible is true—a position which must make some of the authorities who have deciphered them rather astonished, for the fact is the exact opposite. I shall deal with them in my next article.

H. CUTNER

## Letters to a Christian Friend

### (13) "HOLY DEADLOCK"

MY DEAR CHARLES,

A young woman, sweet and innocent and charming, fell in love with an equally nice young man, and he with her. They really loved each other, so at the altar one could truly say in the terms of their religious belief that "God had joined them in Holy Matrimony."

But the nice young man did not wear well with the years. He became a drunkard, a bully, a person of the type that all too many women eventually find they have married. He got drunk whenever he could, he frequently struck and assaulted her violently, he forced excessive sexual demands upon her, he killed all the love and all the obligations that ever bound her to him, and eventually deserted her.

As far as she could discover, however, although now going his own way, and despite his previous demands upon her, he was not living in open sexual relationship with anyone else.

Later the wife strikes a friendship with a decent and sincere fellow, who knows her story, sympathizes with her, and is as eager as she is that they shall be more than friends.

So, now, Charles, what would you advise that woman to do? Yes, of course, you would advise her to seek a divorce under the new law, for which we have to thank mainly the splendid efforts of A. P. Herbert, M.P. (to whose wit also, I believe, we owe the phrase, "holy deadlock").

But the Christian wouldn't do this. Do you know what the Christian, the real follower of Jesus, would do? He would say No to that poor woman, glimpsing another chance of happiness; he would say, "Thou shalt not." Her marriage—to the Christian's poor, distorted view—is indissoluble; she must for ever remain wedded to her drunken, brutal, absentee (but apparently non-adulterous) husband. She can formally "separate" from him, but that is all—unless she can catch him out in an adulterous moment. She must say goodbye to married happiness with the man who really loves her, but who must be to her nothing more than a friend.

Here are Christ's words which, if the world were really Christian, would condemn that woman—and thousands more—to such an inhuman and miserable existence:—

It hath been said: Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement (Deut. xxiv. 1-4). But I say unto you, That whoso-

ever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced (or put away) committeth adultery. (Matt. v. 31-32).

Later on (Matt. xix. 3-12) he is more specific; when the Pharisees ask him, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus replies:—

Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female (Gen. i. 27), and said: For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh (Gen. 2, 24 Sept.)? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (D.V., "let no man").

They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away (Deut. xxiv. 1)? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

We reach the old problem of whether a Christian should approve divorce at all, or whether he should approve it for the sole cause of adultery—further than that he cannot go, as a Christian. For although Jesus, in the Matthew version, seems to allow divorce on grounds of adultery (despite his command, What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder), Mark and Luke have no such exception and their Jesus forbids divorce altogether:—

Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her; and if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (Mark x. 2-12—see also Luke xvi. 18).

Nor does St. Paul allow any qualification or exception:—

The woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth . . . if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress (Rom. vii. 1-3—see 1 Cor. vii. 10-11 and vii. 39).

You will be aware, Charles, of the vast amount of unnecessary and sadistic suffering inflicted on the unhappily married for centuries in the name of these doctrines. It has always been and still is against the Christian Churches, basing their case on these specific teachings of Jesus, that the fight has had to be fought for better, more decent, more respectable, and more human marriage and divorce laws.

Some Christians, by a little stretching of the point, may support divorce for adultery (though possibly even then with a ban on the remarriage of the "guilty party," or both parties); but beyond this inverted glorification of the sexual element of marriage, the Christian cannot go, because Jesus has laid down this narrow, primitive limit.

To divorce on grounds of cruelty, brutality, sadism, drunkenness, venereal disease, desertion, and other things that wreck far more marriages than occasional adulterous flights by husbands and wives, the Christian must say no. It is against his faith.

Many so-called Christians, including yourself, do, as a matter of fact, support the extended facilities given by Herbert's Act, but if you pretend that you approve and support them as Christians, you are hypocrites. It is not because you are Christians, or followers of Jesus, that you support them, but in spite of it. Is any faith worth such intellectual dishonesty?

All the best to all. Affectionately,

R. H. S. STANDEAST

## Dolet: The Freethought Martyr \*

(Continued from page 539)

### VI.

PRINTERS were then a suspected class. Their sympathies were naturally with the party of progress, and the Church regarded them with a jealous eye. By joining their ranks, Dolet, whose orthodoxy had long been doubted, soon laid himself open to the charge of irreligion and even of Atheism. Some of his published epigrams were full of bitter sneers at the monks, his Commentaries sharply attacked the Sorbonne for attempting to suppress the art of printing, and he had in his letters referred to the bosom friend and trusted counsellor of the First President of the Parliament of Paris as "that beast Beda." His character was beyond suspicion; he was a good husband, a good father, a good citizen; but he disregarded Mass, and it was whispered that he ate flesh during Lent. The natural result was that the first two books issued from his press, in 1538, were denounced as heretical, and he was cited to appear before the Vicar-General of the Archbishop of Lyons. Some trumpety charges were made against the *Cato Christianus*, and a more serious one against the *Carmina*, in which he was alleged to have used the word *fatum* in a Pagan and not a Christian sense. But it is probable that a poem in the work addressed to Melancthon gave still greater offence. Mr. Christie translates it thus from the Latin:—

Many a tribe of fools and dolts supplies me with abundant matter for laughter, but there is absolutely nothing I more enjoy laughing at than the insanity of those who, as though they were the kindred of the gods and sharers with them of Jove's heaven, are always discoursing concerning the gods, and teach you how you may be able to arrive at heaven, or how you may be sunk down into the darkness of the black realm. Foolish and intolerable race of men! No doubt they have sat down at the table of Jove and the gods, in order that they may in such wise dispense to us the celestial decrees.

This thinly veiled satire reminds us of Matthew Arnold's saying that some theologians talk familiarly about God as though he were a man in the next street! Such insinuated scorn of the religious doctors was indeed perilous in an age like that.

Dolet was ordered to withdraw these books from sale, and to give a written undertaking not to reprint them without permission. He, of course, obeyed, and for three years he curbed his reckless spirit so as to steer clear of the law. Those three years were the most happy and prosperous period of his life. He had a wife and son whom he dearly loved, constant and profitable literary work, a high reputation as a scholar, and the society of all the men of letters at Lyons. This interval of repose was, however, terminated by his arrest in July, 1542, and the rest of his life, with the exception of a very few months, was spent in prison.

He had removed to the *Rue Merciere*, the Paternoster Row of Lyons, where he had printed the poems of Marot and the *Gargantua* of Rabelais. That was bad enough, but he did still worse. He printed the *Manuel du Chevalier Chrestien*, by poor Louis Berquin, who got burnt to death for heresy. He even printed the New Testament in French, and several other religious works which were all filled, as the sentence on their printer and editor declared, with "damnable and pernicious heresies." All the in-

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

criminated books issued from his press in the first half of 1542, which shows an extraordinary lack of caution. As Mr. Christie says, "he rushed into the lion's mouth with his eyes open." His prosecution on the capital charge of heresy was decided on, and "to make his conviction and destruction more sure, the aid of the most terrible tribunal which the world has seen was invoked, and the court which assembled for his trial was presided over by the Inquisitor-General."

The Inquisition had practised infinite cruelty in France as well as in Spain. The vilest fiends could not have excelled the ingenious tortures it devised and inflicted on heretics. We have already described the horrible *strappado*; but we must find room for a few more delicacies from its hellish *menu*. The official code of the Inquisition, the fifth edition of which appeared in 1730, states that it is for the soul's health of the victim that his feet should not only be burnt, but first well steeped in lard. Another volume by the Inquisitor at Pavia and Piacenza, published at Venice in 1583, adds a new torture to the old *tickling* of the heretic's feet. Salt is to be first rubbed in, and then the feet are to be *licked by a goat*, in order to render the torment more exquisite; Dolet could expect little mercy from devils like these.

The Inquisition's public prosecutor collected matter for his indictment, and after his house and shop had been ransacked and his books seized, he was formally charged with heresy. The old offences for which he had been previously condemned were again cited; a long list of books he had published containing heretical passages was drawn up; and it was alleged that "he had eaten flesh in Lent and other prohibited times, that he had walked about during the mass, and lastly that in his writings he seemed to doubt the immortality of the soul."

The trial lasted until October. All kinds of hearsay evidence were received against him, and he was himself submitted to examination. He defended himself as an obedient son of the Church, but it was of no avail, and on the 2nd of October he was condemned as a heretic, and sentenced to be burnt at the stake.

Dolet at once appealed to the Parliament of Paris. On the 7th of October the King remitted the case to the Grand Council, and the effect of this was to ensure a delay. In the month of June, 1543, the appeal was again remitted to the Parliament, and Dolet was brought from his prison at Lyons to another at Paris. Fortunately he had a friend in Pierre Duchâtel, the King's reader, who personally and warmly urged his cause, and succeeded in procuring the royal pardon. After some further delay Dolet was liberated. Duchâtel was censured by the Cardinal de Tournon, the most powerful man in France, for his interference on behalf of "an Atheist"; but he proudly retorted "in accusing me of forgetting my duty as a bishop it is you who forget your own. I have spoken as a bishop, you are acting as an executioner."

Released from prison, Dolet returned to the bosom of his family and to his literary avocations. He fancied all was well. But his enemies were still on his track. Early in January, 1544, they put his name on two large packets of prohibited books. The ruse succeeded. The matter was brought before the Parliament, and on the 6th of the same month he was arrested in the midst of his family and friends. Three days after he escaped from prison and fled to Piedmont, where he remained concealed for some months. In his absence a grand *auto-de-fe* was made of his books at Notre Dame, the great bell tolling, and the trumpet proclaiming that all printers of such works would be punished as heretics.

In his Piedmont retreat Dolet prepared a series of poems on his imprisonment, called *La Second Enfer*—the Second Hell. To publish this, and to embrace once more his wife and son, he made his way back to Lyons. There he had the *Second Enfer* printed with two dialogues, *Axiochus*, then falsely attributed to Plato. This very volume cost him his life. Three words in one of the dialogues soon after constituted one of the capital charges against him. Mr. Christie says that some of the verses are of considerable merit, and are written in "a pathetic and elevated tone, full of lofty and noble sentiments." One epistle to the King is very outspoken. He calls on Francis to turn against those enemies of virtue who sought to annihilate before his face all good men and lovers of learning. It is of this epistle that M. Aimé Martin, the great historian writes:—

These verses as verses are far from admirable; but what elevation, what courage there is in the sentiments they proclaim! Thus to attack face to face the enemies of humanity, to throw light into the hearts of kings, to teach them that which no one dares to say to them, but which they have so much interest in knowing—namely, that they should make their glory repose on the happiness and intelligence of their people—to do that to-day would be to deserve well of mankind, to do that in those days of superstition was to devote oneself to death.

Dolet set out with his volume for the royal camp, intending to present it to the King. But at Troyes he was arrested and conveyed to Paris, where he was tried for heresy in the *Chambre Ardente*, before Pierre Lizet, the First President.

As this man sentenced Dolet to death we pause to describe his character. He was a zealous hunter of heretics and had sent many to the stake. He busied himself in the prosecution of poor young Morin, who printed Desperiers' *Cymbalum Mundi*, and hastened the death of Louis Berquin. He kept a bookseller in his pay, one André, to discover and betray the sellers and buyers of heretical books. Although he prided himself on his learning, his Latin was so barbarous that one of his sentences caused the King to abolish the use of that tongue on the judicial bench. He was frightfully addicted to wine and women; his red nose and bald head were standing marks for the shafts of satire; and at length became so rotten that his nose actually dropped off! Yet this vilest, meanest of mankind doomed to death one of the best men then living in the world. Thus does superstition elevate vice to the seat of power and prostrate virtue at its feet.

Theologians have often damned men on a very nice point, but there never was a finer one than that on which Dolet was lost. In the *Axiochus* he had, it was alleged, wrongly translated Plato, whom he had made to say "after death *tu ne seras plus rien du tout*—you will be nothing at all." The *rien du tout* was declared to be a damnable addition to the text. "You will not exist" would do, but "you will not exist at all" was a vile heresy. Dolet was damned on these three words. They formed "the sole ground of the charge of blasphemy."

Sentence was not pronounced until the August 2, 1546. In the meanwhile occurred that horrible massacre of the Vaudois, when murder, rape, and flames were let loose against a whole district; when women were outraged in churches and then murdered, and others smoked to death in caves; when hundreds of men whose lives were spared were sent to the galleys, and children were sold as slaves. Pope Paul the Third was delighted, the party of persecution triumphed, and King Francis finally joined them. There could now be no hope for Dolet. His doom was sealed. From his prison he penned a nobly

pathetic *canlique*, full of resignation to his fate and of courage to meet it. On August 2 he was condemned to be hung and then burnt with his books in the Place Maubert, and his property was confiscated to the king. Even the widow and orphan were to share the punishment! It was also ordered that he should be put to the torture before his execution and questioned about his companions; and "if the said Dolet shall cause any scandal or utter any blasphemy, his tongue shall be cut out, and he shall be burnt alive." This infernal sentence was carried out on the morrow, when Holy Church gave him as a birthday gift the ever-lustrous martyr's crown.

He was hung first, and then (for they were not very particular), probably while he still breathed, the faggots were lighted, and the author and his books were consumed in the flames. It is said that instead of a prayer he uttered a pun in Latin—"Non dolet ipse Dolet, sed pia turba dolet—Dolet himself does not grieve, but the pious crowd grieves." But the confessor who attended him to the stake told Montius that he had acknowledged his errors. "I do not believe a word of it," wrote the great Erasmus, "it is the usual story which these people invent after the death of their victims."

Thus perished Étienne Dolet, the Freethought martyr. France may well be proud of such a son, and Humanity must ever hold him dear. He is beyond the reach of admiration and love, but for our own sakes both should be given. Could we stand beside his grave, which bigotry has denied, our eyes might well mingle smiles and tears; tears of sorrow for the bitter fate of a valiant soldier of progress, and smiles of joy that such men have made the world fairer by their lives and holier by their deaths.

G. W. FOOTE

(To be concluded with an account of Dolet's ideas)

## Look on this Picture—and on That!

SCEPTIC: "You have spent a lot of time studying the Hindu religion. Presumably you have never contemplated embracing it."

CHRISTIAN: "Certainly not."

S.: "Why?"

C.: "Because I cannot reconcile my reason with its manifold absurdities."

S.: "What are they?"

C.: "They are too numerous to mention."

S.: "Perhaps you can give me a few salient cases?"

C.: "To begin, there is the dogma of transmigration of souls, each individual soul undergoing a long series of incarnations, commonly stated to be 8,400,000, until the final absorption into Brahma the universal soul. Then there are the vagaries of its gods such as (1) Vishnu assuming the form of a fish to save Manu the alleged progenitor of the human race from destruction by a deluge; (2) taking the form of a tortoise and descending to the bottom of the sea of milk; (3) having recourse to the form of a boar and descending to the depth of the sea to recover the world which had been sunk by a demon; (4) appearing in the form of a dwarf before the demon Bali and requesting as a boon as much land as he could cover in three paces, when, the boon having been granted, he in two gigantic strides covered Heaven and earth which were then wrested out of the demon's rule; and (5) Krishna sporting with the wives and daughters of cowherds. The gods do not monopolize the absurdities, other objects playing their parts. A cow is said to have produced from her limbs large bodies of soldiers by

whose aid an army was destroyed. I am convinced that these incidents could not possibly have happened. To ask me to believe them would be an insult to my intelligence."

S.: "Can you explain why approximately 300,000,000 Hindus believe these tales? You must not overlook the fact that although the vast majority are illiterate many learned men are to be found in their ranks."

C.: "I can only assume that having been taught them from their childhood they have become ingrained in their mentality. You know how difficult it is to eradicate precepts instilled into our minds in our youth."

S.: "Has it ever occurred to you that, speaking generally, the absurdities which mark the Hindu religion are not more grotesque than those permeating the Christian faith?"

C.: "Certainly not. What are the Christian absurdities to which you allude?"

S.: "They are too numerous to mention."

C.: "Can you give me a few outstanding examples?"

S.: "To begin, the Christian God came to earth in the guise of a dove, also in the form of a man in which rôle, among other astonishing exploits, he is alleged to have fed 5,000 people with two fishes and five loaves; turned water into wine; raised the dead to life; allowed himself to be carried by a devil to the top of a mountain; and transferred demons from a sick man to 2,000 swine. Then Christians are expected to believe such fantastic tales as the exploits of a talking snake; the deluge; the building of the Tower of Babel; their God's numerous conversations with Moses, to whom he is said to have shown his back parts; Jonah's adventure in the interior of a whale; the Immaculate Conception, Resurrection and Ascension; and last but not least, Satan being bound and cast into a bottomless pit for 1,000 years. I have selected these incidents from a long list of impossibilities, most of them calculated to strain to breaking point the credulity of a believer in the so-called science of astrology. To ask me to believe them would be an insult to my intelligence. Can you explain why you credit them?"

C.: "I believe in a God the ruler of the universe, and although I do not pretend to understand his ways my faith sustains me in my belief that the Bible is his handiwork, and as such must necessarily be a repository of the truth."

S.: "What you call faith must be the prop used by the Hindus for their belief in their sacred writings, and I am sure you will admit that in their case it is an insecure support. Nevertheless, if you had been born in India of Hindu parents you would have believed unreservedly in the freaks of their gods and other objects, and would have considered it blasphemy if anyone denied them. Particular religions are a product of environment.

PRO REASON

Nothing useful can be poured into a vessel that is already full of what is useless. We must first empty out what is useless.—*Tolstoi.*

To accept Christianity as true in face of its history is a much greater blasphemy than to pronounce it a purely human product.—*J. T. Lloyd.*

There is no ignorance more shameful than to admit as true that which one does not understand; and there is no advantage so great as that of being set free from error.

*Socrates.*

## 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, Mrs. H. Grout.

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place): 7.30, Mr. L. Ebury.

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, Mrs. N. B. Buxton. Rushcroft Road, opposite Brixton Town Hall, 8.0, Tuesday, Mr. F. A. Ridley. Liverpool Grove, Walworth Road, 8.0, Friday, Mr. F. A. Ridley.

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

#### INDOOR

NEWCASTLE (New Church Hall, Cambridge Street): 7.30, Wednesday, Debate—"Did Jesus Christ Exist?" Affirm.: Rev. H. R. Goldsack. Neg.: J. T. Brighton.

#### OUTDOOR

BIRKENHEAD BRANCH N.S.S. (Haymarket): 8.0, Saturday, Park Entrance, 8.0, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. Catherine Street off Grange Road, 8.0, Wednesday. Mr. G. Whitehead will lecture each evening.

BLYTH (The Fountain): 7.0, Monday, Mr. J. T. Brighton. CHESTER-LE-STREET (Riverside Park): 8.0, A Freethought Demonstration. Speakers: Rovshen G. Mahomed, H. Dal-kin and J. T. Brighton.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Mound): 7.0, Mr. Frank Smithies—"Matter Matters."

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. (Bury Market): 8.0, Saturday. Ashton Market, 8.0, Sunday. Wigan Market, 8.0, Monday. Preston Market, 8.0, Wednesday. Mr. W. Atkinson will speak at these meetings.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Stevenson Square): 7.0,

Messrs. G. H. Taylor, C. McCall, Junr. and S. Newton.

MIDDLESBROUGH (Davison Street): 7.0, Thursday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

READ: 7.30, Wednesday, Mr. J. Clayton.

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

SOUTH SHIELDS (Harbour View): 7.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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