

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •
— Founded 1881 —

Vol. LIX.—No. 42

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1939

PRICE THREEPENCE

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>War and the Churches—The Editor</i>	657
<i>War Poems from the West—Mimnermus</i>	659
<i>A Religious "Riddle"—George Bedborough</i>	660
<i>"The Higher Law"—C. G. L. Du Cann</i>	661
<i>Letters to a Christian Friend—R. H. S. Standfast</i>	662
<i>"Jubilee Freethinker Fund"</i>	666
<i>Culture—T. H. Elstob</i>	667
<i>1914 and To-day—Chapman Cohen</i>	668
<i>The Official—George Wallace</i>	669

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

Views and Opinions

War and the Churches

WHEN "savages" go to war—there are, by the way a few savage tribes that are so savage as never to go to war at all—the first important step is a religious one. What are known as magical dances are performed, which by mimicking the defeat of the enemy are believed to secure victory; the Medicine-men are busy intervening between the tribe and its war-god in order to secure help. Meetings are held in places sacred to the gods, and when the war is over, mementoes are placed in "holy" spots as a form of thanks to the gods. The medicine-men do not go to war, they stay behind to work more magic against the enemy.

When civilized Christians go to war priests and parsons and preachers, and other miscellaneous components of the "spiritual" forces, get busy. They invite the people to meet at their "sacred" places, to go through certain ceremonies, sing songs asking their god to give victory over the enemy, repeat certain charms to secure the defeat of those against whom the nation is fighting, and promise their god that they will give to him the glory that comes from conquest and exalt his name evermore. When the war is over they lead representatives of the armed forces, headed by the King, to some of the principal "sacred" buildings, and often decorate these places with captured enemy flags, and even with captured guns. The Christian clergy do not take part in the war, they hold that they do more to secure victory by remaining in the rear and working magic that is more powerful than guns. It may be that the warriors agree with this, for they seldom write home for more priests, to be sent to the front.

There is only one marked difference between the behaviour of "savage" and "civilized" men in their dealing with the gods. The gods of savages stand a chance of being discarded if they do not bring victory. Savages—foolishly—argue that if their god does not bring victory he has failed in his obligations to his followers, and they may throw him over and choose

another. The Christian medicine-man explains that victory has not been secured because their god was not pleased with his followers. So they abase themselves before him and promise to do more to please him in the future. Camels and Christians take their burdens kneeling. With the exception noted above, civilized and uncivilized believers meet on a common ground. The more things alter the more they remain the same—at least where religion is concerned.

* * *

Our Day of Prayer

On October the first the medicine-men of Britain called their followers together to persuade God to give them victory in the present war. This was following the precedent of the "great war," when on the opening of each year there was a "command" performance in the State Churches, and an imitation one in all non-established ones. In due time we *won* that war, although everyone now admits that the victory God gave us in that war only paved the way for the much worse one that was to follow and which is now in being. But "business as usual" is the motto of the priesthood everywhere and in every stage of civilization: and as fear played a great part in the early stages of religion, so whenever fear is in the air the priesthood of every creed seizes its opportunity. In September, 1938, we were exhorted to prostrate ourselves before God; a non-stop magical performance was staged in Westminster Abbey, and long spells of prayer in other "sacred" buildings. God, the parsony said, heard the prayers of his people—gave his people Munich and its aftermath, and so blinded his follower, the Prime Minister, that he was fooled by one of the most transparent cluster of rogues that ever appeared in public life. With uncivilized savages the god who played this trick on his people in all probability have stood a good chance of being discarded. With civilized savages the case is:—

There was an old woman of Sydney,
Who had a disease of the kidney
She prayed to the Lord
That she might be restored
And he could, if he would,
But he didnae.

What is the use of a God who will only help us if we are able to help ourselves, or will answer our prayers only if we have enough men and guns and ships and aeroplanes to accomplish what we wish? There is a rising tide of protest against the huge army of officials that the war has let loose upon us, on the ground that we can accomplish our purpose with fewer officials and more efficient ones. If we can apply the "axe" to the civil services why cannot we display the same amount of common sense in dealing with the religious ones?

Is there any reasonable being who expects anything to follow from this official day of prayer we have just

had? Was it intended to call God's attention to the fact that there is a war on, and to give him a polite reminder that we expect him to do something? And if he does nothing that we can see or feel, what will the partakers in this day of prayer do about it? Will they have the courage to act as the more primitive savages do and drop service to God altogether? If the Poles had managed to sweep back the German forces when they invaded Poland, we are certain that the Pope would have attributed that—at least partly—to the millions of his Roman Catholic followers in that country. During the invasion of Poland the Pope, it was reported, was almost broken-hearted; he slept on the floor, groaned, and prayed for the salvation of the Polish people, in a word he behaved precisely in the manner that his prototype, the primitive medicine-man, does when he is guarding *his* people. What result had this on the invasion? Up to the present it is godless Russia, not godly Poland that has gained through the invasion. And in all the hours spent on prayer on October first not one preacher had the (religious) common sense to seek the short and direct way out of the trouble by trying to induce God to "change the heart" of Hitler, Goering and the rest of the gang. He was asked to change *our* hearts, and to strengthen our minds and so forth, but how much quicker if God had operated directly on Hitler and Co. Will someone be good enough to tell us what effect the day of prayer is expected to have on the progress of the war? Ministers of the crown have told us that we must win the war by saving every scrap of waste-paper, by turning our gardens into cabbage patches, by burrowing underground, by being careful not to let it be known that any recruit is being trained at Slocum-on-the-Slosh, for fear the German Government may learn that our Johnny has been called up, by crawling round in the dark, by keeping light-hearted—and also very serious, but very little actual trust appears to be placed in God. There is not a district in the country in which the Christian inhabitants would not rather hear that an extra battery of anti-aircraft guns had been sent than that the two Archbishops, with Cardinal Hinsley, had come to dwell in their midst. Surely there is enough humbug in the world of politics without adding to it the humbug of petitions to an unlocalizable deity to win the war for us.

* * *

Boosting the Bible

As a kind of addendum to what has been said, I see that 30,000 copies of the Bible are being printed, each one containing a message from the King. They are to be sold, the New Testaments, at sixpence, the Bible at an (at present) undecided price. It is hoped that wives, sweethearts and sisters will send these to the men in the army and navy. The King's message runs as follows:—

To all serving in my forces by sea, or land, or in the air, and indeed to all my people engaged in the defence of the realm, I recommend the reading of the Bible.

For centuries the Bible has been a wholesome and strengthening influence in our national life, and it behoves us in these momentous times to travel with renewed faith to this divine source of comfort and inspiration.

It would not be fair to make the King responsible for either the sending of the message or for its wording, any more than one is justified in making the King responsible for the speech he makes when opening Parliament. Where religion is concerned the King has less power of initiative than any of his subjects; for that was decided for him a couple of centuries before he was born. The religion goes with the post, and the poorest man has a liberty of conscience that is not

permitted to the King. One need not look farther than his chief religious advisers to discover the authorship of this ill-advised message. If the King was allowed the liberty of selecting a religion for himself or of doing without it altogether, one would be in doubt about the authorship of the message.

* * *

A Dangerous Step

As it is, the message is ill-advised because it involves a slight to non-Christians serving in the forces, and so creates dissension where none need exist. A message from the King as head of the State expressing his appreciation of what the men in the army, navy, and air force are doing, and also his regret at the price that many of them will pay, is one thing. To make it the occasion for boosting a sectarian volume and a sectarian church is a very different matter. For while the King must profess a special form of religious belief, there is technically freedom of conscience with all men joining the forces, and with a very large number of them there is no religion at all. But *all* of them are advised to read the Bible because of its strengthening influence in our national life. The Mohammedan's, the Buddhists, the people of all kinds of religious belief and those who are of no religion at all, those who are strongly convinced that religion is actually of positive danger to the modern State, all these are advised to read the Bible and the New Testament because it has strengthened and purified our national life!

It would have been bad enough if the King had been asked to advise soldiers and sailors and air-men to trust in God, or if some other empty religious phrase had been used. But that would not, of course, have pleased his religious advisers. He has been induced to use language that even a great many who call themselves Christians would hesitate at using. All are asked to believe that the book which kept religious persecution alive, which taught the belief in witchcraft, which sanctioned slavery, which taught exorcism as a method of curing disease, which told women they were to obey their husbands with the same unquestioning obedience that they obeyed Jesus Christ, the book which substantially ignores the family, which has nothing to say concerning art, science, education, philosophy, and which out-Nazied Nazi brutality with its doctrine of eternal damnation, it is this book that has been "a wholesome and strengthening influence in our national life." It is a pity that the King has permitted his name to be used in connexion with such a barefaced piece of sectarian propaganda. It will not look well to the millions of Indian subjects of the crown whom we are asking to help us in the war against Fascism.

But the Church is running true to its own record. In the last war it tried to make capital out of the war. In that war, as in the present, it might have retained the respect of men and women who did not believe in its teachings. It might have acted as the Buddhist priests did in the Burmese War when asked for advice by their followers how they should act. The priests replied that the moral law was not to be changed to suit a national crisis. They said that no man could engage in war without paying a price for it in his own character. If there were a clash between national duty and the moral law each one must decide, and be prepared to pay the price of one's decision. That was a teaching too lofty for any Christian Church ever to adopt, for it was the law of cause and effect in the moral sphere as in the physical one. We have to pay the price for war as we reap the benefits of peace. There are situations where one has to suffer the degradation of warfare, in order to escape the greater degradation that may follow refusal to engage in it. The Christian whines about the nobility of war when

it suits him. The brave man, the honest man, looks with level gaze at the situation, and decides that the circumstances from which the brutalizing consequences of war emerge must be faced by those in the fighting line as well as by those who are behind it in order to preserve character from worse consequences even than those that accompany war. Life is seldom, if ever, a choice between the wholly bad and the wholly good. The clear-visioned brave man—and woman—makes the choice with his head up and his eyes open. He pays the price in the coinage of the lesser evil in order to avoid paying in coinage of the greater. He knows that even successful war must be paid for in terms of human injury by those who survive, but he also realizes that he has at least saved himself from the terrible price that one must always pay for obedience to the brutal, and by a submission that strikes at the roots of character.

But I am afraid this is a philosophy which Christianity does not prepare men and women properly to appreciate.

CHAPMAN COHEN

War Poems from the West

Man shall outlast his battles.—*A. Quiller-Couch.*

If winter comes, can spring be far behind.—*Shelley.*

In the intervals of such leisure as can come to an author who has won a great and enviable reputation in the two arts of novel-writing and the drama, Mr. Eden Phillpotts occasionally sought relief by trying his hand at verse. To him, as to other authors, there have come moods which did not lend themselves to the medium of the story or the play; lyrical moods that called aloud for the gracious help of rhyme and rhythm. These accumulated till there was sufficient to fill a small volume, which he issued under the modest title, "Plain Song."

Although published over twenty years ago, these poems are mainly concerned with war, and they are as completely topical to-day as when they were written, which is in itself a high tribute to the author. They have the additional merit of reflecting with consummate art the contemporary point of view of the average Englishman, the plain man who dislikes wearing his heart upon his sleeve. That is, he believes in war only as a last resort; but having accepted the challenge of the aggressors, he will fight with the passion of a righteous cause. These poems are eloquent and even beautiful expressions of the moods of the fighting Englishman, who is a civilian rather than a soldier. To his credit, he has not ignored the sordid and terrible side of militarism, and there are passages that bleach the colour from the romance of war, and others that cause the optimistic sentimentalism that is in one to go out in darkness like a blown candle-flame. Let me quote in illustration the grim piece he calls, "War":—

They know war who freeze and drown and moil
And breathe the air of corpses and breed lice;
Foul to the aching eyes with filth they toil
Brothers, perchance, who made the sacrifice.
Thigh-deep in slough they stand, where, like a den,
Opens the trench of torment; for a space
They fire and load and load and fire; and then
One brother's mangled heart splashes the other's face

To this the pomp and splendour of it come
Behind the burden of their country's yoke.
Behind the bravery, behind the drum,
Behind the fetish that they all invoke;
Life, sacred life, without one pang of ruth,
In mad contempt of human sanctity,
Squandered for doubtful honour, doubtful truth,
All doubtful, save the scorn at frantic reason's plea.

It will be seen that Mr. Phillpotts' poetry is a scholar's verse. The widest culture inspires his happiest phrases, and there is no insular narrowness in his terrible impeachment of militarism. Listen to his fine lines on "Germania":—

We do not smite a nation, but a pest;
Humanity makes reasonable quest
To free a noble slave
Full deep she groans and faints and fainting feels
Archaic torture of a tyrant's heels
Grinding her to her grave.

Possessed of devils now, mad with her woes,
She wounds the world and turns her friends to foes;
But cast her devils down
And broken, humbled, contrite, healed and sane;
Oh may she shine her glorious self again
Pearl in Europa's crown.

And they accurst, who bred this in her heart,
Shall from the councils of mankind depart,
While over sea and shore
The silver trumpets of the sunrise cry
That each pursue her solemn destiny
By blood and iron no more.

Enmity has seldom been expressed in more chivalrous language. Add to these his magnificent lines on "France":—

For all the wit of age and might of youth
Wed at her sweet, deep heart, therein we sound
A well of reason, where doth harbour truth,
And faith, and endurance without bound.
Most sane, most spiritual, because most sane
Upon her bitter road she steadfast shows
The sacrifice majestic; while again
Freedom's own everlasting altar flows
With France's blood; in that most sacred stain
Once more her own immortal genius shows.

But you have not Eden Phillpotts complete unless you add to the scholar the humanist and the lover of Nature. He loves, as few scholars really love, the sea and the sky, and he has a deep and abiding affection for his fellow-men. He rises to great heights in his poem on the young soldiers who fell in the war:—

Now is death only plucking flowers, he leaves
The garnered grain and sunset-coloured fruit
Neither to bending bough, nor mellow root,
Nor threshing of the amber harvest sheaves
He comes; but where in joyous youth serene
The sunny blossoms laugh and fear no sickle keen

Gone; all their promise gone, for nevermore
Shall sun and rain rejoice to do them good,
Or glad earth labour to create their food.
Naked their places, and where, heretofore,
The shining blossoms sprang that now are sped,
Only remains the stocks that built and nourished.

Indeed, this significant book of verse gives us a further knowledge of one of the very foremost of contemporary writers. Not only are the thoughts set down very striking, but they are expressed with exquisite artistry. Although Mr. Phillpotts emphasizes again and yet again the horrors and beastliness of militarism, he sees beyond the tramping and the fighting of the battlefield. To him one figure rises from the shambles of the trenches, and that is the radiant form of Liberty. For he realizes that if the Moloch of Militarism is allowed to work its will, the so-called civilized world would be a shambles inhabited by slaves, and ruled by gangsters.

Again the world is meeting might with might,
And when the battle's fought and lost and won,
Pray victory decree, as primal right,
That reason also wins a kingdom in the sun.

Then shall she swiftly for our world-wide shame,
Bend to the Mother from her starry place
And, in humanity's almighty name,
For ever dry the tears upon that sacred face.

It is significant that only your freethinking poets rise to such heights, and sing with real conviction and intensity of the claims of humanity. But then their faith is set upon the rock of reason, their vision undimmed by old-world ignorance and dogmas. Throughout the world the shadow of the sword has fallen. The fair fields of Europe and Asia resound to the tramping of armed men, and the flower of the manhood of many nations is arrayed for slaughter. A world revolution is taking place, and a fresh page of history is being turned. On the other side was a dawn which will before very long be daylight. The knell of expiring night Nature answers with whispered words of hope. Into a shroud she tosses flowers. Of these many are frail, but one is the bright flower of Liberty. It symbolizes the eternal quest of mankind which will one day make all things new, and will change the face of the half-civilized earth. In that day the Moloch of Militarism will be dethroned, and the reign of Gangsterdom ended.

MIMNERMUS

A Religious "Riddle"

DR. WILKINSON RIDDLE must lead an amusing life "answering" the puzzles, enigmas, and conundrums of readers of the *Christian Herald*—the organ of Christian Fundamentalism including prophecy.

It would be exaggerating the value of Dr. Riddle's weekly page to suggest that he ever "solves" any of the dozen or so problems which darken the existence of pious readers, until finally and for good or evil cleared up by this enterprising know-all.

One "riddle" of the issue before us is headed CONQUERING THE FLESH. A poor (or perhaps rich) Sinner says he has "prayed and prayed" (presumably to God) but finds "it is no use." He seems to have more confidence in Dr. Riddle than in God, and far more reliance is placed on an ordinary three-half-penny letter posted in the most commonplace letter-box, addressed to a mundane office, than on any sort of communication addressed to the Supreme Ruler of Heaven. He trusts Dr. Riddle—possibly because he has never tried him before. He KNOWS from experience what use God and Heaven are to him.

This "Flesh" business probably is the direct result of religious exaggeration of quite minor weaknesses which sermons so often dwell upon—and always unscientifically. The correspondent writes:—

Since January, I have lost all touch with God because I have failed to conquer my evil and filthy nature. I have prayed and prayed, but it is no use. I am so unhappy and troubled.—14110.

Dr. Riddle can only refer "No. 14110" to God for relief, after which "there is no need for you to be unhappy another moment." But No. 14110 has already tried God. No. 14110 would find precious little consolation if he went to God's Word. Joel, Job, Jeremiah, and Jonah tell just about the same tale as No. 14110. Listen to Jeremiah:—

Behold O Lord, for I am in distress; my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; my sighs are many; my heart is faint. . . .

and we must remember that Jeremiah actually attributed all HIS troubles to God as their direct cause. The whole book of the *Lamentations of Jeremiah* is an accusation that "in the day of the Lord's anger none escaped . . . the Lord was as an enemy, HE hath swallowed up Israel."

We turn to another complainant:—

My great trouble is evil thoughts against God, whom I want to love and serve.—L.R.

"L.R." is indeed a riddle. Dr. Riddle is naturally surprised that anyone can be so blind to the goodness of God:—

I cannot understand how anyone could have evil thoughts against God, in the light of all His matchless goodness and kindness to us. I think it will help you if, every morning when you awake, you say, with the Psalmist: "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!"

Dr. Riddle is on dangerous ground in recommending L.R. to quote the Psalmist, "every morning." Suppose L.R. quotes some of those "Cursing Psalms" at the breakfast table! His family will imagine L.R. is quoting from Lassauer's Hymns of Hate! Or a doleful ditty like Psalm 74! Or—in present war-times—entertaining his friends with Psalm 78, which indicts God because:—

He gave His people over unto the sword . . . the fire consumed their young; their maidens were not given in marriage; He smote His enemies in the hinder parts, he put them to a continual reproach.

Several of these correspondents ask:—

Would you please let me know whether we are to take literally such statements as: "If ye love them that love ye, what reward have ye?" and "Love your enemies."—A LEARNER, A PROBLEM, AND OTHERS.

and here Dr. Riddle places Jesus under deep obligation by "unhesitatingly affirming" that the Sermon on the Mount is perfectly all right in its absolutely literal meaning. Indeed, Dr. Riddle protests against rival Christians who "spiritualize" Bible teaching up to the point of positively "vaporizing" it—to quote a bit of Spurgeonian wit.

Here is a more common place inquiry:—

Could you please inform me what papers or magazines could be given to a boy of ten, whose tastes lie in exciting adventure?—M.P.

Mr. M.P. (or is it a title: it sounds like the kind of silly question some M.P.'s frequently ask) should surely know that any local librarian would give him excellent advice about his son's reading. We pity the "boy of ten" if his father (M.P.) takes Dr. Riddle's shocking advice. He recommends—believe it or not—the Children's Special Service Mission whose well-advertised Texts and Sermons for Children are indescribably banal. Any sensible M.P. would advise a sane boy of ten to study the "exciting adventures" of Robinson Crusoe, Robert Louis Stevenson's works, Baron Munchausen, or the hundreds of authors who have made magnificent provision for the leisure reading of boys of ten and thereabouts.

"Troubled One" raises a riddle we have not seen raised before, although it strikes us as quite a problem for evacuees and others:—

When the Lord comes for His people, what will happen to our homes?—(TROUBLED ONE).

Dr. Riddle says "there is no need to be troubled" because we (The people of God) will have a much better "home" than "Mon Repos," or "The Willows" when "called higher." But Dr. Riddle ignores the problem of how the widows and orphans of "God's people" are going to pay the rent when "Troubled One" has ceased to trouble the landlord or bring home his pay-envelope to his dependent family. Father may have gone to heaven, but his good family may be in a hell of a mess.

Another letter-writer bears tribute to the reprehensible state of Christian morality:—

My husband has become a back-slider, and has given way to the worst vices.—(E.D.).

Even allowing for the Exhibitionist nature of E.D.'s terminology, it is difficult to understand the state of mind of a wife who writes to a pious periodical confessing that a husband who has been a church-member is guilty of "the worst of vices."

"Try Prayer," says Dr. Riddle, just for all the world as if the good woman—church member and reader of the *Christian Herald*—had never before heard of this "remedy." Obviously she has tried prayer—and it has failed as usual.

"E.F.M." asks the curious questions:—

Would you please let me know if you consider it right for a Christian woman to marry a man whose wife is dead. Is this committing adultery?—E.F.M.

Instead of giving a straightforward no in answer to the second question, Dr. Riddle simply says, "The question of adultery does not enter into the discussion." He raises no objection to the marriage itself.

The last two questions raised are interesting and illuminating:—

I am known as a religious person, and I want to be sincere, and yet I am not satisfied.—(A.H.).

I am very miserable and unhappy, and almost despair of ever being forgiven.—(B.I.).

Dr. Riddle's replies are neither interesting nor illuminating. Perhaps he knows as well as we do that religion is utterly unsatisfying to anybody possessing reasonable intelligence and experience of life. Unhappily there are many Christians too enlightened to lie about their dissatisfaction, but too superstitiously capable of delusion to throw off the shackles which have bound them so long to useless creeds.

They have only to read Dr. Riddle's elusive running-away from the problem submitted to him, to see the folly of depending on so empty a Will-o-the-wisp. Dr. Riddle says, "God will give you your heart's desire." When? Where? How? We ask in vain. Mythical Saviours and Absentee Providences neither "save" nor "provide." It may shock a human being to discover that he has been duped. He may at least realize that if he loses his heavenly hopes, he will also find that his infernal fears have no basis either:—

Our disbelief in all the heavenly band
Bids us more quickly grasp the human hand,
Opens the heart to all the human blend,
And turns our eyes to Man: man's only friend.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH

Mirage

THERE is no justice, and there never was,
Though some men dream of justice yet to come;
Doubtless the gods are just, but they are dumb,
Or sickness may the just gods indispose.
Howe'er that be, the gods do not disclose
Their good intentions, or they law and hum,
Or favour more the palace than the slum,
Then sink full soon in slumber and repose.

That Judgment Day, which shall make all things right
And balance in the end Life's sad account,
When evil forces shall be put to flight,
And righteousness the throne of power shall mount,
Is wish-fulfilment in Man's sorry plight,
A fantasy, with Evil as its fount.

BAYARD SIMMONS

"The Higher Law"

EVERY free-thinker—indeed every thinker of any kind—ought to read that very remarkable poem by the late Sir Richard Burton, called *The Kasidah. A Lay of the Higher Law*. Beyond doubt or cavil, it is one of the finest pieces of verse in the English language of its kind. It is packed with thought (always compressed, often profound, and occasionally original) upon those fundamental questions with which free-thought is chiefly concerned. One cannot fail to get both profit and pleasure from reading it.

Not less worth study than "The Kasidah" itself are the notes in which Burton (persisting in his incognito) tells us about Hājī Abdū the pilgrim-author, and with much learning expatiates upon its subject, giving us a great deal of his philosophical and metaphysical speculations that were the genesis of the poem. The couplets themselves with all their extraordinary power and beauty are sometimes obscure and sometimes difficult; and their phraseology occasionally has the archaic harshness that betray such authors as Browning and Hardy when the poet's burden of thought sacrifices music to the meaning. But as a whole the poem is a sustained magnificence throughout its nine sections—one of those achievements in words that the world will not willingly let die! Obviously Burton thought his work for "the chosen spirits" of his age in advance of its time, and intended it chiefly for posterity as his quotation from Shelley and the following verse shows:—

In days to come, days slow to dawn, when
Wisdom deigns to dwell with men
These echoes of a voice long stilled haply
shall wake responsive strain.

It is said that the poem went unpublished for 27 years, and even then this great Englishman being in Government service had to take the precaution of anonymity.

James Elroy Flecker with his caravan taking the golden road to Samarkand is reminiscent of Burton's beginning where the caravan starts for Mecca. After this picture in the first section Burton sets out the various aspects under which life has appeared to various wise or foolish teachers of men. He quotes Hafiz, but the joys of love and wine that Hafez sang are joyless; he quotes Omar and scoffs at him; he quotes Jesus (as Isa) and answers him tellingly; he quotes the Believer in-the-Life-to-come, and puts the Keranic Moses against him; he rebukes crushingly those who prate or rave of future—life and Heaven and Hell.

What is the Truth? And the poet answers:—

All faith is false, all faith is true. Truth is
the shattered mirror strown
In myriad bits; while each believes his little
bit the whole to own.

Do not listen to tales and fables stale and trite told by priests who are nothing but horse-leeches demanding money amongst their prayers. Man has no soul; soul is a mere word; man has a self and that is enough. Reason is the sole arbiter and clue to life. Burton denies Heaven and Hell as "dreams of baby minds," and as "tools of the willing Pctisheer to fright the fools his cunning blinds." But one can find in life itself one's real heaven and hell. Man must strive, however, because there is a law that bids us labour, struggle and strain. Joy is not in success but in the effort.

The poet etches a vivid, and at times, vitriolic picture of the theological disputes of Moslem, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Confucian, and Tartar "each believing his glimmering lamp to be the gorgeous

light of day," and urges us not to decide between them, "waging useless war on shadows." Then he sets forth part of his higher law:—

Do what thy manhood bids thee do, from
none but self expect applause
The noblest lives and noblest dies, who
makes and keeps his self-made laws.

All other life is living Death, a world
where none but Phantoms dwell
A breath, a wind, a sound, a voice,
a tinkling of the camel-bell.

For what is man? "The toy, the sport, the waif, the stray of passions, error, wrath and fears," says Burton, "who knows not whence he came nor why, who kens not whither bound and when." Of ourselves and our life he has many such eloquent and striking descriptions. Finally he reaches his stark conclusion: "There is no God" ameliorated by the thought that though man dances on Death's very brink the dance is no less "full of fun" for that.

In vivid word-pictures Burton traces the evolution of the God-idea; he plays with the ideas of Buddha and Confucius, of Egyptian and Jew and Greek. He is particularly severe on the Christian doctrine of original sin. Good and Bad he declares to be man-made whims, created by self-interest, changing with race and place; for all crimes have been virtues and all virtues crimes, somewhen, somewhere. He points out and laments the contradictions, the mysteries, the dark End, and the radical sadness of all existence; he paints the dread history of man from the pre-Adamite horrors of the slime to modern plagues like war and earthquake. Man makes God in his own image: there is no God as man makes him, depicting only varieties of himself in an accentuated form as Rousseau and Schiller and Carl Vogt in their various ways also declared.

The world is old and thou art young: the world
is large and thou art small.
Cease, atom of a moment's span, to hold
thyself an All-in-All!

That is finely and unforgettably said. And there are many other couplets as fine as these throughout the whole long poem of 267 stanzas.

How shall a man live? Burton does not shirk giving an answer. We are to fight ignorance, and above all, to know ourselves. Our "ignorance of our ignorance" is the deadliest foe; we are to be true to our nature and ourselves; be our own God; pluck "the old woman" from our breasts, spurning equally the bribe of Heaven or the threat of Hell and doing good for its own sake. We should not eat our own hearts, nor live in the dead past but strongly and bravely; unhasting and unresting, seeing and hearing clearly, live in the present. It is the "Now" that is man's little all. We are to abjure the "Why" and seek the "How": we are to be equally resigned to life or death.

"My duty towards Myself" with a proper regard to others is the sufficient object of existence and the affections and sympathies are the highest pleasures of man's life. Leave alone the unanswerable Sphinx-questions of life that never have been, nor can be, answered; and remember that if "Nothingness" be the end of life as is most likely, "Thy toils and troubles, want and woe at length have won their guerdon—Rest." (By the way Burton lived his own virile creed as his biography shows).

Such is this poem—"the whisper of the Desert wind; the tinkling of the camel-bell"—and is it not one of the glories both of English literature and human thought? Do not take my word for it: Go to the poem and see for yourself. And when you have read the work, read it again for this gold-mine will

not yield all its precious metal at a first effort. You will never regret, or forget, reading it and the poem will become a part of you by the compelling force of its genius. For my part, I have only one doubt about it: that this Higher Law demands a higher spirit of courage to live by it than most of us possess.

C. G. L. DU CANN

Letters to a Christian Friend

(16) THE MESSIAH

MY DEAR CHARLES,

In our survey of the teachings of Jesus, with particular reference to their social content or value, I have dealt in considerable detail with the Sermon on the Mount and other aspects, and as these embody all the main points of the teachings, I do not propose—in changed circumstances—to cover the remaining sections of the Gospels in such detail, unless any specific new points arise.

Those "changed circumstances" you already know of. Cut off in the main from my books, notes, references, etc., and above all from that familiar friendly contact with them which one takes so much for granted in normal life, I feel very much like a fish out of water; and find that, even on a restricted scale, research work within the narrow confines of a sanatorium cubicle entails simple material obstacles that surprise one by their very existence, so used has one become to a different order of things. Moreover, one is regarded as a very queer and naughty fish if he persists in "littering up" with books and papers and other visible things those places where all should be spotless invisibility, nothingness, and tidiness. He who "accumulates" two books where one book lay before receives none of the tributes lavished on the pioneer and patriot who merely makes two blades of grass flourish where one grew before, but is promptly stamped as a menace who may strike at the roots of the efficiency of the British Hospital System. Life becomes a complicated, though good-humoured, struggle between the patient's expansionist tendencies towards a more liberal *lebensraum*, and the determined resistance of the British Hospital System to root out such threatened chaos and defend its cherished tradition of "tidy lockers."

So, in humbler mood, to return to the Gospels, from which all quotations will now be from the Revised Version only.

At the important ceremony of sending out the twelve disciples, when they are charged with the mission of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven and preaching the gospel, Jesus at the outset stamps the new faith with the fanatical intolerance and vindictiveness which have so often characterized Christianity and Christians: the disciples are symbolically to shake off the dust from their feet of those cities and houses which do not receive them or listen to their gospel, and "it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city" (Matt. x. 15). Again, "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven" (x. 33). (These from the Jesus who preached "love your enemies," "forgive seventy times seven," "turn the other cheek.")

The disciples and Christians generally are themselves to meet intolerance, hatred, persecution, and death because of their faith, but are to fear not and trust in the Lord, and "he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (x. 22), "he that findeth his life will

lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake will find it" (x. 39).

The reward motive is well to the fore, of course: those who receive the gospel and its bearers are to receive "a prophet's reward," or "a righteous man's reward," and "whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (x. 42).

Also there is a Messianic note: the disciples "will not have gone over the cities of Israel before the Son of man be come" (x. 23). There are further suggestions of the Messianic role in Jesus's words about John the Baptist at the opening of chapter xi. of Matthew.

Chapter xi. continues with more vituperative abuse of the cities who had not received the gospel and repented, despite Jesus's "mighty works," and are accordingly to be "brought down to hell"; and the chapter concludes with the invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . ."

In chapter xii., after dialectical victories over the extreme doctrinaire Pharisees on issues of sabbatarianism, Jesus, in another brush with these particular opponents of his, declares that every idle word we utter will have to be accounted for in the day of judgment, when by our words we shall be justified or condemned; and there is heard again the harsh and unforgiving intolerance of the new faith and its founder:—

Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this world, or in the world to come (Matt. xii. 31-32).

Later on Jesus definitely assumes (or reveals) the role of the Messiah—though he commands the disciples to tell no one—and begins to foretell and prepare for his own ritualistic death and resurrection. Asking his disciples who they think he is, he receives the reply from Simon Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and is so delighted that he utters the fateful words upon which the Christian Church, more particularly the Roman Catholic section, was to build up such a soul-destroying domination of its adherents by an all-powerful priesthood:—

Thou art Peter (Greek, Petros, meaning a stone), and upon this rock I will build my church. . . . And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. xvi. 18-19).

Jesus also tells the disciples:—

If any one desire to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever shall desire to save his life will lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake will find it. For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give as an exchange for his soul?

For the Son of man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There are some standing here who will not taste of death till they have seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Matt. xvi. 24-28).

Six days later, according to Matthew, comes the "transfiguration" of Jesus, in the presence of Peter, James, and John his brother, after which Jesus charges his companions, "Tell the vision to no man until the Son of man be risen from the dead" (xvii. 9).

The more we fill in the details of the picture of this "Son of man," Charles, the more we find that it is a picture not of any social reformer, or any pioneer of a new world order, but simply of "the Christ, the Son of the living God," heralding an era not of worldly things but of spiritual things. Whether he himself assumed the messianic role or whether it was interpolated for him afterwards, does not really matter; the whole of the teachings are based on that ultra-individualist other-worldly system of values which perforce deprives them of any fundamental humanist worth.

More anon. Hope all are well at home.

Affectionately,

R. H. S. STANDEAST

Acid Drops

One Christian lie in the European situation appears to flourish. This is the often repeated statement in religious papers, and by those who are hired to write religious articles in ordinary papers, that Hitler is without God, or Hitler defies God, and so forth. This is not merely nonsense, it is a deliberate trade lie. Hitler is a very religious man. He is constantly appealing to God, and there is nothing to show that it is not the Christian God to whom he appeals. He was bred a Catholic, and has never renounced Catholicism. It is true he has confiscated some of the wealth of the Church, but other, and very Christian rulers, have done the same when it suited their purpose. Our own King Henry the Eighth was not a bad hand at that. Nor are Christian preachers suppressed in Germany—provided they obey Hitler while preaching. And here, again, Hitler has some very excellent precedents from the Church itself. Hitler is a profoundly religious man; that is the one element in his nature that makes him the perfect scoundrel.

Sheffield Cathedral has dismantled its stained-glass window and buried the glass. The more valuable of the monuments inside the Cathedral have been dismantled also. This is quite a sensible precaution, but what an insult to God Almighty! It shows not the slightest confidence in his ability to protect his own property, or his own "sacred" buildings. And in the same address the Provost of the Cathedral, as reported in the *Sheffield Telegraph* advised people to attend services of "intercession." For what? If God cannot protect his own buildings from German raiders, what hope can anyone have that he can interfere in any other direction? The older religion becomes the more stupidly it behaves.

Other Churches are suffering because of their members having no little faith in the protection of God, that they have gone away into the country, or stay away from evening service, because of the dark nights. Perhaps they have New Testament authority for not being out after blackout time, for the followers of Jesus are told, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness." It is true the believer is also told that "the light (of the gospel) shineth in darkness," but not in a complete blackout, and as the Government has forbidden the use of torches, believers decline the risk of groping their way to Church. At any rate the West Hampstead Congregational Church has shut up partly on this account and also for lack of funds. So it seems that it really does not make much difference whether Christians are told they shall or shall not be in the darkness. They are not going to chance it.

The Angels of Mons were a great fiction-feature in the last war. (We will again tell the story of that episode when we have time). This time it looks as if the DEMONS were to figure largely in the fictional theology of to-day. The Dean of St. Paul's declares, with needless emphasis, that

we cannot avoid the feeling that there are Demonic Powers at work in the world.

If the war lasts long enough, and the preachers of superstition are left to their own inventiveness, we shall be returning to the days of intellectual darkness when Demons accounted for all sicknesses and most other evils. The probability is that Dean Matthews knows perfectly well that the demonic theories were based on absolute ignorance. He is merely pandering to the contemporary ignorance of the lowest intellects amongst his supporters. Even a Modernist Churchman ought not to talk as if he believed in such outdated superstitions as these.

"There is No Such Thing as an Unanswered Prayer." This is a headline from the *Universe*. Need we mention that the Popes have prayed for centuries for the conversion of England, the present Pope prayed that the present war might be averted, a League of Prayer which boasts its millions prays daily for peace, and no King or Prince or President would ever die at all if there were no unanswered prayers.

Our readers may remember that the Rev. R. J. Campbell was once thought of as the firebrand of the City Temple, because he let fly some mild heresies that were advocated by Freethinkers about a century and a half ago. But eventually he sought the profitable shelter of the English Church and now functions very quietly, and quite harmlessly—for a parson—in a fashionable "Joss-House." But he is anxious to help—the Church—during the war, and wishes

to remove a misapprehension that the war with all its slaughters and misery is a judgment of God . . . the war is not God's work.

We fully accept Mr. Campbell's disclaimer. We do not believe that God causes war, or that he causes storms, or shipwrecks, or fevers, or earthquakes, and so forth. We have always said so, all our life. God does none of these things. We join Mr. Campbell in his crusade against those who says God does this, that or the other. But will Mr. Campbell, in return for the help we give, please be good enough to tell just what God really does? That is a very pressing problem. A God who used the lightning to enforce his will, a God who caused an earthquake because Atheism was encouraged, might command fear, and through fear worship. But a God who sits up aloft merely seeing things go, is first ignored, then held in contempt, and finally dismissed. So will Mr. Campbell tell us "What is it that God does, or what has he done since he 'called' Mr. Campbell to his present job?"

The *Universe* advised all good Catholics to take part in the crusade of Rosaries for a speedy peace. It should be noted that Rosaries are *sold*, as are the sacred candles. There is a tariff marking the Roman Catholic road to heaven. It is only the road to hell that is free.

Canon Cockin, of St. Paul's, says that mankind is being punished for its sins. He says that man "was on the verge of showing that he could dispense with God." But not all men were dispensing with God, and, taking the Canon's statement as true, that as God has got wild he isn't being praised enough, it seems a bit promiscuous that he should let loose a war and so kill with a truly "divine" recklessness those who were dispensing with him and those who continued to puff him up in their daily prayers. A God of that kind really cannot be depended on. God looks round, discovers that some people are dispensing with him, and says "I'll larn 'em," and so stirs up a war, and kills indiscriminately all who believe in him and all who are "dispensing" with him. Canon Cockin says that God's kingdom *must* win in the end. But why the devil doesn't it win in the beginning? Most of us believe that the Allies will win in the end, but the members of a Government that kept the war on for years—merely to "larn 'em"—would find themselves decorating lamp-posts.

From the *Time Magazine*, New York:—

Patron saint of those condemned to death is St. Dismas, the "Good Thief," who was crucified alongside Jesus and asked the Lord to remember him in Heaven. In the U.S., Dismas was a much-neglected saint until the late Dempster MacMurphy, business manager of the *Chicago Daily News*, took him up, wrote an annual piece about him (*TIME*, March 6). Last Sunday Most Rev. Francis J. Monaghan, Roman Catholic Bishop of Ogdensburg, N.Y., laid the cornerstone of the first U.S. Church dedicated to Dismas. Its location: inside the north gate of Clinton Prison, Dannemora, N.Y. Prisoners are building the church with stone from the prison quarry.

A few days ago the *Times* admitted to its once cultured columns a letter from a correspondent who claimed that Ezekiel Chapter 39 "depicts aptly the situation in this present year '39." We doubt whether "God and Ham-ongog" refer to Germany and Russia, and why anybody should be told to

speak unto every feathered fowl and to every beast of the field (verse 17).

and while dead horses may conceivably be used as food we have never heard of anyone being "filled at my table with horses and CHARIOTS"—a most indigestible meal! Ezekiel—in his 40-41 chapters—describes a queer building, probably the lunatic-asylum where he lived. Possibly Hitler has fashioned his own house on Ezekiel's model, and in any case Ezekiel (vi. 12-15 and elsewhere) used language remarkably like the phraseology of the Leader of Berchtesgaden:—

He that is far off shall die of the pestilence, and he that is near shall die of the sword; and he that remaineth shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them.

The *Guardian*—a church weekly—thinks that the Pope—unmoved by the murder and torture of Jews, Freethinkers and others under Hitler and Streicher will be stirred into sympathy now that he can no longer count on

an independent Poland—the one great Roman Catholic country in Eastern Europe, and a bulwark against the pressure of Soviet Atheism across Russia's Western frontier. All the influence of the Vatican must now be in favour of Poland.

Even the tragedy of Poland is seen only through the ugly spectacles of sectarian interest.

Fifty Years Ago

CHRISTIANITY has always held forward the bachelor ideal of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist as the highest, but it has never been able to prevent its celibate followers from sinking to a very low level indeed. The history of sacerdotal celibacy is one long disgusting record of an attempt to wage war against nature. The earliest known canon of the Church on the subject is the 33rd of the Council of Illiberis (about 305), which forbade the conjugal intercourse of bishops, priests, and deacons, and sub-deacons with their wives—a nice specimen of early Christian good sense and fine morality. This decree was speedily followed by others in the same direction which soon led to scandals of the grossest kind, which have followed the institution of clerical celibacy down to our own time. Despite the old superstition of the superior holiness of a bachelor life, the general lay view, we incline to suspect, was expressed by the northern nations, who, long before the Reformation, broke out in insurrection and demanded that the clergy should be compelled to marry, as otherwise no man's wife or daughters would be safe.

The Freethinker, October 13, 1889

To get a New Subscriber is to make a New Friend

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

B. H. HASSELL.—Hope to see you at Leicester soon. Glad you think that so long as we "are at the helm all is right." But it must be remembered that the cleverest of men at the helm cannot do very much unless he has a faithful crew. Perhaps the helmsman gets too large a share of the praise. Thanks must be given to those who do not appear in the limelight.

C. H. HOLLINGHAM.—We thank you for your promise to repeat your donation quarterly "for the duration." But there is no need for anyone to put themselves to any strain, so long as each interested person is ready to do what he, or she, can.

J. MCCARTNEY thanks us for notes on Beverley Nichols, and thinks the editor of the *Sunday Chronicle* must have a poor opinion of the intelligence of his readers. Not of all his readers, but papers are written for the greater number, and, as in Carlyle's day, they are the "mostlies."

R. SPIERS.—This war has commenced by ruining large numbers of business men. One wonders if that was absolutely unavoidable.

S.C.—Mr. Cohen's refusal of any "testimonial" in the shape of a personal gift, is quite definite. But he will regard the response to the *Freethinker* Appeal as some indication of the feeling towards him. But as we have said, we do not wish anyone to subscribe in a panic, or to give more than they reasonably should. The paper is safe, but we would like less worry.

W. S. MCNEIL.—Will put your suggestion before Executive.

R. B. KERR.—Will appear next week. Crowded out of this issue.

O. D. CORRICK.—We have every confidence that the *Freethinker* will continue as usual, without decrease in size, and, we hope, deterioration in quality.

R. TA'BOIS.—There is no photograph of Mr. Cohen available, but a new one will appear in the autobiography on which he is now engaged.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plams

Our welcome contributor, Mr. G. H. Taylor writes:—

I must express my appreciation of the well-defined line you have taken *re* current events. Its sobriety of judgment is well in keeping with your teachings in the past.

As Mr. Taylor is not given to paying either fulsome or hasty judgments we place a corresponding value on the compliment paid.

Owing to the outbreak of war several of Mr. Cohen's lecturing engagements had to be cancelled. He was counting the abstention from lecturing this side of Christmas as not altogether an unmixed calamity. He has a lot of extra work on hand, and in addition he is busy writing an autobiography which threatens to run to some

200 to 250 pages, and to be out by Christmas. Requests from friends at home and abroad having reached him to write an account of his fifty years work in the Freethought movement, he has decided to do so. It will, however, be a rather unusual autobiography, but it should be the more interesting, because of its freedom from that mass of personal chatter which makes so many works of this kind valuable only to the curious and of momentary interest only.

We are pleased to hear from attendants at some of Mr. Clayton's lectures an account of the excellent work he is doing at his out-door meetings. Mr. Clayton's work is often rather difficult as he has carried the Freethought message into places where it has seldom been heard, and where often physical force is threatened. But perseverance, courage and tact usually wear such manifestations down, and Mr. Clayton is not easily mastered by that kind of thing. We wish him continued success in his efforts.

But some afternoon lectures have been arranged. Mr. Cohen will visit Leicester on October 29, when he will speak on "Fifty Years of Freethought." He will probably be at Liverpool on a date during November, and also at Glasgow soon after. Other meetings may be decided upon.

The North London Branch is continuing holding its evening meetings, blackout or no blackout. Mr. Elstob was the speaker on Sunday last, and had a good audience. To-day there is a discussion between Captain Ackworth, D.S.O., who represents the Evolution Protest Society, and Mr. T. F. Palmer, who is well known to all our readers. The chair will be taken at 7.30. Address, Cricketer's Arms, Inverness Street, Camden Town.

The new Southend Branch, which has been holding some successful meetings in the open-air has secured the use of the I.L.P. Rooms, 6 Broadway Market, Victoria Circus, and will hold meetings every Wednesday evening, commencing on October 18. We hope local Freethinkers will give the new Branch every help they can.

Spare me the whispering, crowded room,
The friends who come, and gape, and go;
The ceremonious air of gloom—
All which makes death a hideous show!

Nor bring, to see me cease to live,
Some doctor full of phrase and fame,
To shake his sapient head, and give
The ill he cannot cure a name.

Nor fetch, to take the accustom'd toll
Of the poor sinner bound for death,
His brother doctor of the soul,
To canvass with official breath.

The future and its viewless things—
That undiscover'd mystery
Which one who feels death's winnowing wings
Must needs read clearer, sure, than he!

Bring none of these; but let me be,
While all around in silence lies,
Moved to the window near and see
Once more before my dying eyes.

Bathed in the sacred dews of morn
The wide aerial landscape spread—
The world which was ere I was born,
The world which lasts when I am dead;

Which never was the friend of *one*,
Nor promised love it could not give,
But lit for all its generous sun,
And lived itself, and made us live.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

"Jubilee Freethinker Fund"

I HAVE adopted this title for the *Freethinker* Fund in order to appease one of our regular readers, Mr. H. Martin. In sending his subscription he writes

I can assure you that many of us will be more than disappointed by your rejection of the proposed testimonial to you on completing your Jubilee on the Freethought platform. . . . I admire your attitude but regret your decision. But why not call your effort The "Jubilee Fund," that will remind us all of something we ought to bear in mind.

We have adopted part of the suggestion, so we hope that will gratify all who share Mr. Martin's feelings.

We do not think we could well have selected a worse time at which to ask for financial help, even for the *Freethinker*. Thousands of small businesses have been ruined, and it is now being admitted by the "reforms" promised that a little less haste, and a smaller army of officials might have been better. But I had no choice in the matter of this appeal. We put off asking for help so long as it was possible. I dislike doing it at any time, but I cannot allow my own feelings to decide when such a situation as the present one arises. The needs of our Cause comes first, and I do not think that anyone will seriously dispute the opinion that to the fighting Freethought movement in this country there is nothing of so great importance as the well-being of the *Freethinker*.

One contributor suggests that we should make an appeal for substantial donations so that the Endowment Trust would be able to supply an additional income of £250 annually. I appreciate the suggestion, but I do not consider that the moment is propitious for such an effort. At present rates of investment a capital sum of at least £6,000 would be required, and short of that long-expected millionaire arriving there is no likelihood of this being done.

Moreover a moderate effort on the part of interested readers should supply what is required, without putting a strain on anyone, and I am hoping to see enough coming in to avoid saying any more about it for several years. It is the part of my job that I heartily dislike.

I have received many encouraging and complimentary letters in connexion with this effort, some of them too flattering for me to print, but I give the place of honour to the following that comes without any name or address, or I would have answered it personally. The letter is addressed, "To our dear Editor," and runs as follows:—

Just a "widows' mite" for the *Freethinker* Endowment Trust from two grateful admirers.

The mite is a postal order for one shilling, and I value that shilling as much as a cheque for a thousand pounds. I do not store up letters, but I shall keep this one. I wish I knew the senders, but the letter is unsigned. I take it that "Endowment Trust" is a slip of the pen, and that this much appreciated subscription is in reply to what I said last week. I feel inclined to preserve the postal order as well as the letter.

Mr. A. Devereaux hopes the response to the appeal will "considerably exceed expectations," and expresses "sincere admiration for your fifty years of magnificent and self-sacrificing work." Mr. G. Morton writes "You strike a welcome note among the welter of wheedling appeals received from generally conventional or orthodox quarters." We do not believe in begging at any time. We offer the opportunity for all Freethinkers to play a part in forwarding the greatest work in which they can engage. Many people in this country have just awakened to the fact

that freedom is something worth fighting for. We Freethinkers have always been fighting for a form of freedom upon which all other liberties ultimately depend.

Mr. Jack Barton in enclosing cheque regrets that his contribution is not larger, "but with falling dividends and soaring taxation I should have to be a modern Jesus Christ to work the loaves and fishes trick to-day." Mr. Bolton says "The amount you mention as being your salary fills me with indignation, but then, it is only in keeping with one's conception of you." We will say only that we decided what the payment should be. We have no objection to a thousand a year, but we have always had a devil of a job to get £156. But we never, either with lecturing or writing made payment a condition of doing either, and at seventy-one it is hardly worth making changes. Let our friends look after the paper, and as we said last week, we will take that as a Jubilee gift to ourself.

Our old friend Thomas Dixon—his name carries our memory back to work on Tyneside forty-five years ago—hopes that increased taxes and other difficulties will not seriously affect the response to our appeal. Mr. J. Pablo says he has been a reader for forty-five years, and his cheque (£5) "represents about a half-penny a week for that period of freedom. I have never received so much for so little." Rather a novel way of calculating. If all used the same rule we should get all we need—and more. Another old friend, Mr. A. G. Lye, hopes for "a fine response," and respects the confidence we have. He adds, "Your hints as to other protection of our rights is taken." We can assure Mr. Lye that we see no need for fear, provided the financial difficulty is overcome. We are not easily caught napping.

Lady Simon hopes, with others, we are "taking as much care as possible of your health and handing on as much work as you can to others." Up to the present we feel better than we have for some time. Dangers and difficulties act as a tonic. That seems the only good use to which they can be put. Did Shakespeare say that "Dangers and difficulties are tonics to the wise and huggears to fools"—or did he mean to say it, but left it to us to voice? Mr. and Mrs. Minnett, in sending their contribution, ask us to accept it "as a personal tribute both to yourself and for your long service to Freethought." We have had many similar personal notes, but some of them made us blush so much that the reflection from our cheeks set fire to the letters, and so they are lost to all but myself.

From a very old member of the movement, Mr. J. Hammond, comes the following:—

After all your years of loving labour for the paper it is hard that your difficulties should now be increased by another war. . . . May I take this opportunity to thank you for your illuminating articles and comments upon the war and the events which led up to it.

Mr. Hammond is some six years our senior, and was staying with us, and shared the experience of the last air raid in the district in which we live, one which experienced nearly all the London raids. As we had a very large battery of guns within 15 minutes walk we were able to provide him with a full dress performance for his first air-raid. Now we are waiting in the same spot to see what kind of a show we shall have this time. Quite tame up to date.

Mr. T. Robson says:—

It is disappointing you cannot be freed from these recurring financial worries because of passing circumstances.

We can assure Mr. Robson that we are not seriously

disturbed by these worries. We expected them when we undertook our responsibilities.

There are many more interesting letters, but we lack space for more this week. The reading has been very encouraging. We have many more from which we wish to quote, and which we think will be read with interest by our readers.

Only one final word, which is to express our full appreciation to those who have written saying that they have suffered so heavily—businesses closed down, etc.—that they could only send their good wishes. Quite sincerely we value these letters as much as anything they could have sent. Their uneasiness at not being able to do more evidences a fine feeling.

The following is the first list of subscriptions:—

	£	s.	d.
Two "Widows' Mite"	0	1	0
Dr. A. W. Laing	50	0	0
"Cine Cere"	10	0	0
F. B. Belton	10	10	0
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A. G. Lye	5	0	0
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A. W. Coleman	1	1	0
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Sylvia Winkworth	0	5	0
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E. S. Finney	2	2	0
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T. Robson	1	0	0
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J. Hammond	1	1	0
J. F. Aust and Wife	1	1	0
A. Harison	5	0	0
F. S. B. Lawes	10	0	0
J. McCartney	1	0	0
A. Edwards	2	0	0
Francis Warne	1	0	0
Joseph Close	0	10	6
J. W. H. Davis	0	2	0
A. D. Carrick	5	0	0
E. H. Hassell	1	0	0
A. Stephenson	0	10	0
C. M. Hollingham	1	1	0

R. Spiers	1	0	0
Herbert Hulse	1	0	0
S. Carlile	0	10	0
"Widower's Mite"	0	2	0
Patrick O'Dee	0	10	0
Peter Cotes	0	5	0

Total £173 9 6

The above represents sums received up to and including October 9. We shall be obliged if errors either in names or amounts are pointed out.

CHAPMAN COHEN

Culture

THE Russians have no culture, said an upholder of the old regime to me in the course of a chat. My thoughts went back to a meeting two years ago in the Friends' Hall, when leading representatives of English science, art, and literature testified to the contributions that had already been made in these fields by the U.S.S.R. I was about to make a retort based upon this experience, when I realized the futility of so doing. The reason was my recognition that the two of us meant by the term Culture different things. Whereas to me a cultured person was a person who was fairly-well acquainted with the world's best thoughts and the world's best deeds over the entire field of human activity, the idea of culture, to my friend, was inextricably bound up with the inflections of speech, the cut of the clothes, the observance of "etiquette." In the desire to be fair I will throw into his side of the scales a certain (conditional) courtesy and a deportment far from objectionable. This to my friend was "culture," and as we differed fundamentally, further conversation on the specific point was valueless.

The maintenance of the *status quo* to such people (and there are thousands of them) is culture. In the endeavour to conserve it, other even less admirable things are conserved, and it is difficult to elicit where it is that the passion for a culture of this type first and foremost derives its strength. Is table etiquette appreciated as an excellent cultural triumph, or is it only raised as a barrier to keep firm the line of demarcation between the "classes? If a jobbing builder makes enough money to purchase and consume asparagus as often as he feels disposed, why is it necessary to erect cultural difficulties which will make it hard for him to eat it in a cultured way? Because of these difficulties he still will prove himself a jobbing builder, and that he hasn't entered the Holy of Holies. You will find that a cultured person of this order will give as a reason why one should not eat peas with one's knife, not that there is a danger of cutting one's mouth, but that it simply *isn't done*. Such an infantile philosophy knows little or nothing of cause and effect; such an instruction is laid down as a law of "good breeding." It comes from our Social Sinai which dictates and rewards those who listen. It is not *common-sense* to eat peas with one's knife, but the habit is rarely reprobated in such crude terms. It is a question of culture. A line of class demarcation cannot be drawn on lines of common sense. Otherwise how could feeble-minded Alophus Frederick William Menzies Smith Colquhoun D— and flibbertigibbert Winnie (who mixes cocktails excellently) G.; how could they gain their position in the upper circles? It is easy to see that it is "breeding" that tells, not common-sense.

It is, of course, true that ideas of culture which need such support are, just now, having a bad quarter of an hour, and rightly so. Still the right people

meet in the right places at the right times, religiously narrowing their own circles, and manage to chant the old lays with something that passes for enthusiasm. Yes it is their religion, right enough, but there is a glimmering in their minds, and more of a glimmer in some of their minds, that the correct accent and fashionable cut must be fought for with fierceness, and, if need be, unscrupulousness, for they are bound up with things much more important. Any system of morality which refuses to recognize their lines of division must not be allowed the name of morality. Those who do so must be branded a bad lot, or uncultured, or demented; almost any unpleasant term is permissible. It is not difficult to detect, fortunately, that this aspect of the old world is tumbling to bits. The bottom is falling out of it, in spite of all their efforts. Values, to use the common phrase, are altering. There may be danger in the process. There could be unworthy results. A somersaulting of class feeling would mark no real advance; it is the eradication of class feeling that counts. An inverted snobbery would be a poor exchange—it would be no exchange at all. What would justify the work of all that gallant army of freethinking pioneers would be the substitution of a system of values that would recognize that it is the type of work that a person contributes to society that makes him a worthy citizen or otherwise. If such a person is possessed of a passion for knowledge and has also judgment which enables him to eliminate his personal equation and choose the true and reject the false, if he refuses to be the slave of his emotions and realizes that his personal interests are ultimately bound up with the interests of all, then he can lay claim to be a person of culture, according to the degree to which he carries out his principles. This may not enable him to obtain popular plaudits; it will certainly not help him to fill his purse. But the Freethinker who acts accordingly will find himself in rich pastures. He will even with justification be able to take himself seriously, and in the only way that the facts allow him to do. Should he therefore lay claim to the word "cultured" his claim could not be dismissed with derision. And he can remember the words of Kingdon Clifford, words which will increase his pride and magnify his sense of responsibility in a mad world.

It is not only the leader of men, statesman, philosopher, or poet, that owes this bounden duty to mankind. Every rustic who delivers in the village ale-house his slow, infrequent sentences, may help to kill or keep alive the fatal superstitions which clog his race. Every hard-worked wife of an artisan may transmit to her children beliefs which shall knit society together, or rend it in pieces. No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe.

It is true that this duty is a hard one, and the doubt which comes out of it is often a very bitter thing. It leaves us bare and powerless where we thought that we were safe and strong. To know all about everything is to know how to deal with it under all circumstances. . . . It is the sense of power attached to a sense of knowledge that makes men desirous of believing and afraid of doubting.

This sense of power is the highest and best of pleasures when the belief on which it is founded is a true belief and has been fairly earned by investigation. For then we may justly feel that it is common property, and holds good for others as well as for ourselves. Then we may be glad, not that *I* have learned secrets by which I am safer and stronger, but that *we men* have got mastery over more of the world; and we shall be strong, not for ourselves, but in the name of Man and in his strength.

The Ethics of Belief, Clifford's Essays, p. 343

T. H. ELSTON

1914 and To-day

[It has been suggested that some of the articles which we published at the beginning of the war of 1914 would be applicable to-day. We have adopted the suggestion.]

THE Society of Friends has issued a manifesto "To Men and Women of Goodwill in the British Empire." It is concerned with the present crisis, and aims at pointing out the duty of Christians in the face of a state of affairs such as the present. One must admit that if any Christian sect has the right to lecture others on the evils of war, it is the Society of Friends. Alone amongst Christians they have protested against the use of brute force in either public or private life. And the appreciation of their attitude by other Christians may be seen in the fact that the Society of Friends is a dwindling body, and has never represented but a small minority of believers. From one point of view the policy of the "Quakers" may be said to show the impossibilist character of Christian teaching. Unqualified non-resistance is an unqualified absurdity. Qualified non-resistance means not resisting more than is necessary. In practice it means the substitution of one form of resistance for another. It was possible for the Society of Friends, individually or collectively, to disclaim the use of force, because they were living in a society which applied the measure of force needful for their protection. They did not resist in person, but, so far as force was needful for their protection, they did resist vicariously. The police, the courts, the whole organization of society, apply the force necessary to individual protection.

There are some things in this "Message" with which all Freethinkers will agree. This war, we are told, "spells the bankruptcy of much that we have lightly called Christianity." Certainly it spells the bankruptcy of Christianity, not lightly so-called, but properly so-called. The war proves—if proof were needed—the utter worthlessness of Christianity as a civilizing factor. The nations engaged are not fighting non-Christian Powers; it is so far a family quarrel. Germany, Russia, Austria, England, Servia, are professedly Christian nations. They all worship the same God, profess what is fundamentally the same creed. They are all brothers in Christ, but that does not prevent their cutting each other's throats on the battlefield with the utmost heartiness. Nor can their common religious faith be counted on to render the combat less bitter or less bloody. On the contrary, one can safely say that so far as religious feelings enter into the quarrel, they will only serve to prevent a lasting peace being secured. In the Near East the quarrels of the followers of the Greek and Latin Churches are as fruitful of trouble as are those of Catholics and Protestants in Ireland.

Intellectually Christianity is manifestly bankrupt. What the present war does is to emphasize its social bankruptcy. I am not concerned with a Christianity that *might* have existed in the primitive ages, or with a Christianity that may exist in the very distant future. The only Christianity we have to bother about, and the only Christianity that is worth bothering about, is that which meets us as an historic fact. And that Christianity is bankrupt in every conceivable direction. It has not alone failed to bring people of different nations and races to the point of living together peacefully, but, through its official representatives, it has never failed to provide excuses for national iniquities, and to cover them with a cloak of moral and religious justification. When the European nations wanted a religious justification for their buccaneering expeditions in Africa, in China, and elsewhere, the Churches supplied it. When excuses

were needed for the wholesale exploitation of the "lower" races, the Churches found all that was needed. The war in Europe is not a war for the maintenance of national possessions or liberty in Europe; it is very largely a war for the control of races outside Europe, and for purposes of sheer exploitation.

It is a plain truth that if the Christians of the world could only live at peace together, war would be a thing of the past. A Mohammedan power such as Turkey could not threaten the peace of Europe. There is little to dread from Japan—if other nations treat her fairly and decently. And, at any rate, it was only the cupidity and bullying of Christian powers that compelled Japan to become a great military and naval power. China has centuries of peaceful traditions behind her, and is only showing signs of breaking away from those traditions because of the action and influence of the Christian powers. It is the Christians of the world that have taught mankind the meaning of the "mailed fist," and that the only way to prevent aggression is to be able to apply sufficient physical force to make successful aggression impossible. And when mutual suspicion and the competitive exploitation of heathen races have made a disastrous war inevitable sooner or later, there is much talk of the justice of this nation or of that nation in joining in the conflict. Of course they are justified. If one burglar attempts to take from another his share of the "swag," the one attacked is justified in resisting. But it would have been far better had they both been brought up in a different school, and so acquired tastes that would have turned their energies in a quite different direction.

Christianity is bankrupt because it never possessed the capital needful to run the business of civilizing humanity. Its brotherhood of man never meant, even in theory, more than a brotherhood of believers, and in practice it did not always mean that. It recognized duties and obligations between members of the same church or sect, but outside these boundaries it applied a different code of ethics. What kind of brotherhood did Christians bestow on Jews and heretics for hundreds of years? Christians in their hey-day of power would have looked with amazement on anyone who claimed consideration for either. What kind of brotherly attention did the inhabitants of ancient Mexico and Peru receive from their Christian conquerors? How fared the Redskins of North America, the Maoris of New Zealand, or inhabitants of Africa at the hands of their Christian brothers? In practice nearly always, and in theory often, Christians have shown that their doctrine of brotherhood meant little more than the mere brotherhood of a gang. Within the gang rules must be observed. Outside the gang they might be broken with impunity.

What is there about Christianity that would teach people of different nations or races to live harmoniously together and so make warfare impossible? Is it the Doctrine of the Fatherhood of God? When and where has it shown the slightest influence in this direction? There is no doctrine that Christians have been more ready to fight about. Christianity has no social doctrine, no theory of social life or of the nature of human association that would bring a more rational spirit into affairs. Its business from the outset has been to save souls; not to make useful citizens but to fashion candidates for the New Jerusalem. It was this that led it to neglect the splendid civilization of antiquity, and to allow its institutions to fall into decay. One must admit that it has pursued this work with a certain amount of earnestness. And its very earnestness in this direction has spelt disservice to civilization. It directed energy into unfruitful channels. Had the energy that Christianity has expended in the attempt to prepare mankind for a mythical

heaven been spent in teaching the merest rudiments of a sane social life, Europe to-day might have been a gigantic commonwealth instead of an aggregation of armed camps.

We are told that we ought to "seek the forgiveness of Almighty God." The position seems to me the other way about. If there is an Almighty God, He should be seeking our forgiveness for not fashioning man better than he has done. Either God made man or man made God. If the latter, then religion may be dismissed as a myth. If the former, then the responsibility for man's conduct rests with God, and we surely have no need to ask God's forgiveness for our being as he made us. In any case, things could not be worse without the belief in God. That they are as they are with the belief in God is certainly good grounds for questioning its value.

All will agree that "the only possible permanent foundation" for European culture is "mutual trust and goodwill." But that mutual trust and goodwill cannot be based upon religious belief, about which people have always differed, and concerning which they will never cease to differ. It must be built upon something deeper and more inclusive than religion, something that appeals to men and women of all nations and races. Even in such a thing as warfare it is not religious belief that binds people together. The differences of religious belief remain what they were during the progress of a war, and the British soldier or sailor who finds himself at one with all around him in carrying out his duty, separates from them when it comes to religion. Catholic and Protestant, Methodist and Episcopalian, soldiers will fight side by side, but, if they can, they will separate when it comes to a religious service. In war, as in peace, it is the common unextinguishable, social needs that drive people together; but religion serves to separate them.

CHAPMAN COHEN

(Reprinted from *Freethinker*, August, 1914)

The Official

"Dressed in a little, brief authority."

AN official is "one who holds a civil office; one appointed to discharge the duties of a public office, or charge." But how this official may discharge his duties is quite another story.

He may discharge his duties in an (1) officious manner, with a cold, inhuman correctness, observant of all proper offices; or he may (2) discharge his duties quite as correctly and yet be attentive, obliging, willing to help. If he fulfilled either of these conditions he would be acting in an officious manner according to the dictionary.

If he acted "officiously," he would act (3) kindly, with a solicitude and kindness; or (4) with importunateness in an officious, meddlesome or importunate manner. If "officiousness" characterized his manner, he would be full of (5) solicitude, anxious care, attentive readiness to do kind offices; (6) Serviceableness, usefulness, utility; (7) excessive forwardness in interfering in matters which do not concern one; meddlesomeness, interference.

Now, if an official acted in an officious manner the meaning given by (1) would be as it is understood to-day. If he acted officiously, (4) would describe his action; and if officiousness characterized his action (7) gives its popular meaning.

But if an official be a kindly, sympathetic person, willing and anxious, in the doing of his duty, to help his fellowmen, it matters little how many meanings the word may have.

Were it not for the convenience and service of the people, public officials would not exist. People resent, and quite rightly, being bullied into doing what is right. The public must be prevented from doing wrong. But they must not be treated wrongfully. And whenever government officials, or others, do something which any of the public question the correctness of, free legal advice should be available for every doubter.

The official classes have had a special training. They are there to help and not to hinder. The police are trained to give evidence. Many a prisoner would have gone free had he had a similar training. A little training may be a dangerous thing. There is a wide difference between a cultured, refined judge and an ordinary magistrate. Many of our magistrates are neither cultured nor kindly. But they consider themselves important pieces in the social game.

Our official classes need not act as detectives. They can be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves. Once the people are convinced that the official classes wish to help them to do right the people will begin to respect them.

Official persons all make a great parade of their religion. In their method of living, however, they repudiate it, though parts of it seem to have been written specially for them, e.g. :—

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due,
When it is in the power of thine hand to do it.
(Proverbs iii. 27).

But to make a long story short. Whatever shortcomings official persons may have, I am painfully conscious of my own inability to judge. In my encyclopaedic dictionary my classification there is beyond any shadow of doubt whatever :—

IDIOT: "A man in private life, as contra-distinguished from one occupying an official position, it being presumed that the highest intellect and education—nay, all the education—would be found in the Government service."

GEORGE WALLACE

Twenty Five Years Ago

WHAT is there about Christianity that would teach people of different nations or races to live harmoniously together and so make warfare impossible? Is it the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God? When and where has it shown the slightest influence in this direction? There is no doctrine that Christians have been more ready to fight about. Christianity has no social doctrine, no theory of social life or of the nature of human association that would bring a more rational spirit into affairs. Its business from the outset has been to save souls. Not to make useful citizens but to fashion candidates for the New Jerusalem. It was this that led it to neglect the splendid civilization of antiquity, and to allow its institutions to fall into decay. One must admit that it has pursued this work with a certain amount of earnestness. And its very earnestness in this direction has spelt disservice to civilization. It directed energy into unfruitful channels. Had the energy that Christianity expended, generation after generation, in the attempt to prepare mankind for a mythical heaven, been spent in teaching the merest rudiments of a sane social life, Europe to-day might have been a gigantic commonwealth instead of an aggregation of armed camps.

National Secular Society

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD OCTOBER 8, 1939

THE President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.
Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, Elstob, Bryant, Wood, Preece, Seibert, Ebury, Horowitz, Griffiths, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, and the Secretary.
Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members accepted. Correspondence from Birkenhead, Southend, and West Ham Branches dealt with and instructions given. Preliminary arrangements connected with the Annual Dinner were sanctioned. A number of items prompted by the prevailing circumstances were generally discussed. The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Sunday, November 12, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

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

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12 a.m. until 6 p.m. Various Speakers.

INDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Cricketers Arms, near Camden Town Tube Station): 7.30, Debate: "Is the Theory of Evolution a Discredited Doctrine?" Affir.: Capt. Ackworth, D.S.O., R.N. (Evolution Protest Movement). Neg.: T. F. Palmer.

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BIKENHEAD (Wirral) Branch N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement): 7.0, Mr. G. Whitehead—"The Truth about *Mein Kampf*."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Mid Hall, St. Andrew's Hall): Muriel Whitefield—"Round the World with Freethinkers." See local papers for further particulars.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Mr. Joseph McCabe.

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

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

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