

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions

### All About Nothing

A FRIEND once remarked to me that I would find something amusing in a funeral. I replied that it would depend upon who was being buried. Another friend—a deacon of a Presbyterian Church—spent some time explaining to me, after I had commented on the almost indecent formality of religious services at the graveside, why he considered a secular burial service as holding out no hope or comfort to the mourners. After listening to him I agreed that he had so far made out his case that I felt I would rather see a Christian buried than a Freethinker. I was once visited, at the *Freethinker* office, by a well-meaning simple kind of a parson, who wished to trace a very excellent saying by Ingersoll. I could not give him what he required, because it was the kind of broad-minded, humanitarian sentiment that Ingersoll might have expressed in connexion with any subject. But he kept on talking, talking, and I was very busy. At length he rose to leave, but paused at the door to say, "Well, after all we need not think any the worse of each other because we disagree." I agreed with him, and closed the interview by saying, "If I believed in a God I would say that he intended you to be a Christian"—and left him to decide whether I intended an insult or a compliment.

Any of these incidents might have provided material for a very solemn argument, with profound reflections in this or that direction. But I happened to feel otherwise, and it may be that my frivolous replies did more to excite serious thinking than would have been aroused otherwise. The New Testament tells us we must not cast our pearls before swine, and I take it that the food we give, whether mental or physical should be such as is likely to be digested by those who receive it. Moreover these be serious times, and it is advisable not to take them too solemnly. We may have to wear gas-masks, but meanwhile let us get as many laughs out of them as we can. Some wise man said that laughter is a gift of the gods. I am sure

that was never said by a Christian. The Christian God never encouraged laughter, even though he may have provided material for it. It was a parson of the old school who protested against the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Movement, and finished up by saying, "Thank God there has never been a pleasant Sunday afternoon in my Church." Let us be merry.

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### Something from Nothing

So this week we will leave the war and other serious matters alone, and turn to a journal which if not humorous in its aims, yet provides many a laugh for those who appreciate it from the proper point of view. In the course of a leading article in the *Church Times* for October 13, I came across this gem:—

That it is a privilege to have been called out of nothing into the light of life is an axiom of the Christian philosophy.

The writer is referring to the birth of man—every man, and there is no doubt that this is good, sound, orthodox Christian teaching. For example. The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, originally drawn up at Westminster in 1647, and established as the avowed confession of the Church of Scotland (my copy is dated 1874), says very definitely:—

It pleased God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom and goodness, in the beginning, to create out of nothing the world and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

That is quite clear. The material, nothing, was abundant, and it could offer no difficulties to its manipulation, even though one might agree with the traveller through the American Rockies, who commented to a fellow passenger that God might profitably have put in an extra day's work in that locality. Still the Rockies is a noteworthy performance. If only some of that same primitive material could be given France and Britain our taxation might be much lighter than it is.

The *Church Times* is, therefore, on good historical and orthodox ground. The orthodoxy is unquestionable, the *sound* leaves nothing of which to complain.

But it is at this point I come a cropper. I ponder things when they look profound, smile when they are witty, and laugh when they are merely humorous—which latter represents the more clownish aspect of wit, and is therefore the more popular. Frankly, at this point, I am puzzled to decide whether the *Church Times* agrees with me that when things are most serious one should cultivate laughter, and is giving its readers something at which to laugh during the nightly blackout, or whether it is putting this old Christian doctrine of "nothing" in different terms. I have been very hard at work lately, I missed my annual holiday this year, and it may be that these

things, together with advancing years, have dulled my perceptions.

I write thus because the *Church Times* says that the fact of life coming out of nothing is an axiom. To be quite just, the editor qualifies his statement by saying it is a Christian axiom, not that it would be considered such by any teacher of science or of philosophy or of logic. It is just a Christian axiom. It must be there that the catch lies, and he may be trying to compete with some of the dreary humorists of the B.B.C., or the Marx Brothers.

For an axiom is something that is self-evident, a statement the truth of which needs no further demonstration. Perhaps I ought, in order to understand the axiomatic nature of the statement cited, imitate the man who was being offered a volume of Brownings's poems. He said, "I have a Browning already and I can't understand him." "Well," said his friend, picking up another volume of poetry, "Have you prayed?" "Yes," came the reply, "I have prayed, and still I can't understand him." Perhaps instead of writing about "nothing" I ought to have prayed. But I am not in the habit of bothering God over my petty troubles, and he has enough to look after already with a kind of "Have you heard this one?" kind of a question. I do realize that if I prayed long enough and hard enough, I might one day see how something came out of nothing; I also recognize that if one prays one must not be in a hurry. If Canute had possessed patience he would have found the sea going back in a few hours, and would have demonstrated his own greatness. But I do not quite see that I ought to spend my few remaining years waiting for an answer to my conundrum.

It is an axiom says the *Church Times* that something (life) has been called out of nothing. Well, I can pull a fish out of a river, get water out of a tap, get sense out of a man (sometimes), and eggs out of a chicken. But how does one extract something out of nothing? Start from the beginning. How does something get into nothing? If something gets into nothing are we to assume there is mere nothing when something is there, and less of nothing when something is not there? Life is certainly something. There is no mistake in that. But this something has been coming out of nothing for several million years. Is there any probability of nothing being exhausted by this constant discharge of nothing? Is that really what is meant by the mortality of life? I get in a greater and greater tangle the more I think about it.

Perhaps I am on the wrong track altogether. The *Church Times* believes that life came from God. Can it be that the editor is poking fun at most of his readers, and informing the few discerning ones that the very basis of the Christian religion is "nothing"? In that case he may count on receiving full marks for a piece of satire that is worthy of Voltaire. And certain it is that so far as the Christian Church is concerned, it has during the whole of its history been getting something in exchange for nothing.

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Is it a Plot?

I agree that there is a sense in which the word "nothing" carries a positive significance. We have thousands of preachers who say nothing, ministerial statements that tell us nothing, writers who give us nothing, people in office who do nothing, and hundreds of thousands of people who are nothing. But in all these instances "nothing" carries with it what the new science of Semantics calls a "referent." We imply that the Cabinet Minister should tell us something, that the parson should say something, that one in office should do something, and so forth. In other

words, we mean that the man who sets out to do a job should do it.

Just as I conclude that sentence a flash of light comes to me. "Nothing" may have in religion a significance it does not possess in ordinary life. I may have stumbled on one of the greatest heresies of modern times. For the Christian religion does in a very subtle sense depend for its existence on a succession of nothings. The Christian religion depends for existence upon a revelation from God—and that is nothing. It says that on a certain date a boy was born without a human father—and that is nothing, it never happened. It says that God came down from heaven and was crucified for the sins of men—and that is nothing. The clergy know that the origin of such beliefs is perfectly well known, but they say nothing about it. The Archbishop of Canterbury says that when the disciples came to the tomb of their Lord they found nothing. When they are asked to give us evidence of a miracle they offer us nothing. Never in the whole history of the world did any institution depend so much upon nothing as the Christian Church.

So maybe the editor of the *Church Times* is in his sly manner attacking the very religion he is paid to defend. He is saying to the world, "Here is a system that is based on nothing, and manned by an army of priests who, as priests, produce nothing. But they have in sober truth brought something out of nothing. They have brought fat salaries and position and power out of nothing." "It is a privilege" to have so much out of nothing. It "is an axiom of Christian philosophy" that much may come out of nothing, and the Church is the "living witness" of how much can be built on nothing. The whole play of the passage I have cited turns upon a symbolic use of the idea of something coming out of nothing.

Only one other theory presents itself. This is that as so many music halls are closed owing to the black-out, the Marx Brothers broke into the office of the *Church Times*, murdered the editor, and wrote the leading article in the issue for October thirteen. I congratulate them.

CHAPMAN COHEN

## The Greatest War-Book

To bear all naked truths,  
And to envisage circumstance, all calm;  
That is the top of sovereignty.—Keats

He is a true fugitive that flies from reason.

Marcus Aurelius.

TIMES of war and stress are usually supposed to be fatal to philosophic calm, and it is curious that the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the immortal book animated by high purpose and fortitude, should have been largely written at odd moments in a tent on a battlefield. Indeed, many of the famous maxims in the *Meditations* were jotted down in the actual theatre of the World-War, as, for instance, at Carnuntum, on the Danube, a few miles from Vienna.

Marcus Aurelius, one of the greatest of the Roman Emperors, was no feather-bed soldier, nor did he review his troops within the safe confines of a parade ground. His philosophy was thought out amid the storm and stress of actual battle, the elation of real victory, and the sorrow of defeat. What others learnt in calm and retirement, he learnt in war and tempest. The most perfect expression of "the gospel of those who do not believe in the supernatural," as Renan called it, was produced to the dread background of war itself. Far away on the wide open spaces might

then be heard the endless, ceaseless sound of beating horses' hoofs and the marching feet of men. The barbarians were gathering their legions, and no man could say what the morrow would bring forth.

The Emperor's passing was noble. He died in the camp, surrounded by the soldiers he led. "Why weep for me," were his last brave words, so characteristic of the noblest Roman of them all. His legacy to posterity was a little book of *Meditations*, which was never intended for publication, and in which he recorded his own inmost convictions on life and death, and the questions that knock at every man's brain. Burdened with the weight of empire and of Rome, he penned such words as these—not to be read at the distance of twenty centuries without an accession of pride and strength; "Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man to do what thou hast in hand with simple and perfect dignity." And, again, "Do every action of your life as if it were thy last." This present life, he tells us, is all that concerns us :—

Though you were destined to live three thousand, or, if you please, thirty thousand years, yet remember that no man can lose any other life than that which he lives now, and neither is he possessed of any other than that which he loses.

Epicurus bade his followers depart from life as a satisfied guest from a banquet. Marcus Aurelius, in sterner language, bids us leave the stage of life as an actor who has played his part, small or great. It is his perfectly sane view of things which has caused the golden book of the *Meditations* to become one of the most prized of all volumes. It is this wise Secularism which takes tired people back to Marcus Aurelius, when all the other religions and philosophies have failed them in their hour of need. What a book might be written of the great men who came to the *Meditations* in the bad hours, when fame and fortune, and honour itself, seemed as unreal as the fabric of dreams. For, by the irony of fate, their austere wearer of the imperial purple of Old Rome has become one of the great consolers of men. His treasure of the *Meditations* is one of the most precious heritages handed down the centuries by the masters of the world.

Oh! the charm of Marcus Aurelius! He was so much more than a mere writer, for he bound men to him by something far stronger than a chain of roses, the thrill of the dance, or the sparkle of Falernian wine. It is not his grace of language, or his apt turn of phrase, that cause men to read his little book near twenty centuries after his death. It is not merely his Stoical philosophy that causes men to turn to him from all other wisdom. It was not to Lucretius; with his world-grip of human destiny; or Virgil, with his tears over mortal fortune; or Horace, who sings well and sweetly of banquets, the laughter of women, the joy of summer days; but to the austere soldier-leader, that men turned in the last resort to which they are pushed so often :—

With close-lipped patience for their only friend.

The stream of thought slips slowly away, and it is not a little amazing to realize that Marcus Aurelius, writing two millenniums ago, should "come home to men's minds and bosoms" in this twentieth century. It is not enough to say that he was a Stoic, although Stoicism appealed equally to the lame slave, Epictetus, to the aristocratic Seneca, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. All antiquity was cruel but the *Meditations* not only reveal the author's intense humanism, but give quite a modern aspect to his writings. Not for nothing has this precious volume been called "the

Golden Book," for priceless thoughts confront us on every page. Here are a few :—

Men are made one for another.

That which is not good for the swarm cannot be good for the bee.

To desire impossible things is the part of a madman.

O Nature! From thee are all things, in thee all things subsist, and to thee all tend.

The best kind of revenge is not to repeat the injury.

Remember that all is but opinion, and all opinion depends on the mind.

He that sinneth, sinneth unto himself. He that is unjust injures himself, in that he makes himself worse than he was before.

The ideas of the Roman Emperor still have sufficient life to fire the hearts and brains of men of this remote generation. It is a splendid achievement, this silent power over men of all ages, races, and sympathies. Small wonder that Ernest Renan, a writer of nice distinction, and a rare critic, has spoken of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius in terms of more unmixed eulogy than he has ever bestowed elsewhere.

The *Meditations*, be it remembered, were never intended for publication, but were written for their author's eyes alone. They are the Emperor's commonplace book, where he entered, from time to time, his reflections, often quite unconnected, on matters that interest all men. The little volume was long considered a literary curiosity. It fitly headed the very brief list of the writings of kings, a class not in any way remarkable for literary genius. Scholars talk of the Greeks as being the teachers of Marcus Aurelius. It is profoundly true, but still, methinks, the golden book of the *Meditations* could only have been written by a Roman. The strength, the tenderness, the humanity, the resignation, these are the gifts of the lords of human things, the masters of the world.

No less a critic than Matthew Arnold has pointed out that the *Meditations* are counsels of perfection. It must be said that they do not claim to be other than self-communications. The maxims should be read, as they were written, one at a time. Marcus Aurelius addressed them, not to any reader, but to himself alone, as the sentinels and sign-posts of a conduct of life. In their intimacy and frankness lies their great and abiding charm. He may not be profound, but he is always honest and sincere. "Such as thy thoughts are," he writes, "such will your mind be in time." He knew thought would issue in act. He drills his mind, as it were, so that when the time comes, it may be guided. Most magnificent of monarchs, realizing Plato's ideal of the king-philosopher, fate made him a soldier. It was in camp before the enemy that he passed away, dying a soldier's death.

The present troublous time is one in which such high-minded advice as that of Marcus Aurelius is priceless, for in all the world's literature there is no other book so full of perfect sanity and wise Secularism. It is because the *Meditations* are a bracing tonic in distress that the book has survived through so many generations of men, and still ranks among the valued assets of our own day. "The glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome," have long since faded, "like snow upon the dusty desert's face," but the great ruler's words of wisdom remain a most precious legacy, because he saw life steadily and saw it whole :—

Not Cæsar dying amid Roman sighs

By Pompey's statue, seems more great than thee.

## The Tragedy of Modern Poland

THE Russian annexations and reforms of Peter the Great were extended by the Empress Catherine from 1762 to 1796. At this period Poland had seriously declined from the power and prestige she enjoyed at the opening of the sixteenth century. Both in language and racially the Poles were closely akin to the Russians, and their dominions occupied an imposing area in Continental Europe. But, while Moscow was becoming unified and expanding her domains, Poland sank rapidly towards decrepitude. Progress was made impossible by a constitution which conferred on any single aristocratic landowner the power to completely veto any proposed legislation, particularly that of an ameliorative character. The peasantry were more deeply plunged in superstition and serfdom than those of pre-revolutionary France. The Polish frontiers had no natural defences and lacked reasonable military safeguards. This defenceless state therefore made Poland an easy prey to her avaricious neighbours.

When the antagonism between Russian and Austrian interests precipitated a quarrel, Frederick, the Prussian ruler, cynically suggested that the covetousness of both Powers might very conveniently become sated by the annexation of the possessions of harmless Poland, if he himself were allotted one-third of the seized territory. So this nefarious plan was adopted, and the first Partition of Poland was carried out in 1772. But there still remained a wide and attractive domain to plunder, and a second partition was contemplated which might prepare the way for the absorption of the menaced dominion. The Poles were naturally fearful of further encroachment, and their ruler, Stanislas, made a gallant effort to reform and strengthen his diminished State. Indeed, as Grant and Temperley note in their *Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1798-1938)*, Longmans, 1939: "When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, the Polish question was the most urgent matter for Prussia, Russia and Austria. They were anxious for their booty, jealous of one another, fearful of being outwitted. The interaction of the Polish problem and the French Revolution gives the clue to much of the diplomacy of the next years."

Stanislas' reforms included an amended Polish constitution in 1791, and projected a more prosperous future. But the reconstruction of the remnant of the earlier Polish kingdom served to stimulate the avarice of her aggressive neighbours. Catherine of Russia schemed to secure the lion's share of the plunder in the coming second partition, and strove diplomatically to embroil Austria and Prussia in the complications occasioned by the Gallic disturbances which gave grave concern to the autocratic monarchies. Bent on checkmating and outwitting each other, they divided their attention between a resurrected Poland and the dangers arising from the French Republic. Consequently, they failed to prevent the victorious march of the Revolutionary armies. It is significant that Poland's second partition was arranged in 1793. Prussia and Russia were to steal Polish territory, while Austria was to be placated with the possession of Alsace-Lorraine, when these provinces had been wrested from France. This project proved an idle dream, and Austria was so mortified that it appeared more probable that the marauding Powers would engage in conflict on the Vistula, than in the vicinity of the Rhine. These Eastern entanglements enabled the French to recover from their earlier reverses, and initiate the series of brilliant victories which later led to the French ascendancy throughout Continental Europe under Napoleon.

Poland had now been reduced to a condition of in-

solveny and impoverishment, so in 1795 Austria and Russia together conspired to divide the surviving territories of the maimed State. These confederates kept Prussia in the dark while they plotted and, although she received a share of the spoil, she remained very sullen and suspicious regarding her unscrupulous neighbours, while her humiliating treaty with France did not improve Prussia's humour.

Having annexed Holland and North-Western Germany in 1810, Bonaparte decided to create the Duchy of Warsaw out of the Polish province he had taken from Prussia and Austria. This led to ill-feeling between France and Russia, then in league, as the Czar was extremely sensitive concerning Polish autonomy. As Grant and Temperley intimate, Russia "had many millions of Poles among her own subjects, and the idea of independence might have an awkward effect upon their imaginations. Napoleon had promised that the name of Poland should not reappear on the map; but the Duchy of Warsaw was Poland under a thin veil. The Czar was profoundly discontented with Napoleon's Polish policy. Of all the causes of conflict between the two, the Polish question was probably the most important." As all the world knows, the French invasion of Russia in 1812 ended in tragic disaster, which proved the prelude to the bloody Battle of Leipzig, in which Napoleon was overthrown.

With the Emperor's abdication and exile, his allied enemies assembled in Vienna to arrange European resettlement. Again, the eternal Polish question created discord, and apparently Napoleon was induced to escape from Elba by the reports of the bitter dissensions of the diplomatists at Vienna concerning the Saxon-Polish problem. Still, when the Treaty of Vienna came into operation after Waterloo had been won, Russia's determination secured for her a large proportion of Poland with its capital Warsaw, while Prussia retained much of her spoil, leaving Austria the remainder.

While Czar Alexander succeeded in enlisting the services of a few patriotic Poles in his plan of reform, yet the vast majority scorned and detested their Russian rulers. The people compared their departed glory and superior culture with that of the "barbarous Tartars," much to the latter's disadvantage. Any Moscovite concession they regarded with the prejudiced suspicion of Celtic Ireland towards England. The Polish Parliament of 1820 was soon dismissed, and when the Diet reassembled a few years later, its powers were severely restricted, and the granted constitution practically abolished. Secret societies arose, and when Alexander died in 1825, a conspiracy was formed against Nicholas, his successor, who was so incensed that he determined to suppress what liberty remained at the first favourable opportunity. The fourth and final Diet was summoned in 1830, when the influences of the Paris Revolution of that year inflamed the rebellious spirit of the Poles. The new Czar was prepared to suppress the insurgents in France and Belgium, when an insurrection occurred in Russian Poland. The Russian garrison was withdrawn from Warsaw, and a national administration was formed.

Unfortunately, the Poles deposed the Czar and wasted much valuable time in fruitless negotiations. Very soon the Russian forces re-entered the country and although the opening engagements proved indecisive until May, 1831, the Polish army was shattered by vastly superior numbers in September. Warsaw surrendered, and Polish independence was at an end, and for more than twenty years military autocracy reigned supreme.

This heroic struggle for liberty aroused great sympathy in France and Britain, but Russia paid no heed. Still, the most repressive measures failed to daunt the

unconquerable national spirit. Prussian rule itself was less harsh than Russian, while the Austrian Poles preserved a modicum of freedom. Indeed, it is thought that the Austrian annexation of Cracow in 1846 stimulated Polish nationalism in Galicia, where a species of self-government was permitted. It is said that "Cracow became the centre of Polish culture, art, literature, and national propaganda. And the nucleus of aspiration formed there was eventually to spread all over Poland."

After the Polish insurrection in 1848, the insurgents were severely repressed. Yet, the passion for independence flamed on. The visions of their fatherland's splendid past were preserved in romantic stories and the golden age of the sixteenth century was painted in gorgeous colours which differed materially from sober truth. Alexander II. tried to conciliate the Poles, but his agrarian reforms were coupled with military conscription. So, in 1863 the disaffected people rose in revolt, only to be pitilessly suppressed.

Although the French and English favoured the insurgents, Bismarck refused all assistance to Poland as he was anxious to preserve Russia's good will. He ignored all the protests of the German *intelligentsia*, and even disregarded the humane counsels of the Prussian Crown Prince himself. On the other hand, he assured the Russian ruler of Prussian sympathy and co-operation despite the stormy indignation of the Prussian Parliament and the liberal-minded public of Germany.

Thus the position remained until the conclusion of the World War, when the victorious Allies decided to restore an autonomous Poland with access to the sea, with an integrity that must be guaranteed by international covenant. The frontier problem was exceedingly complex, for Poles and Germans were intermingled along the whole boundary line from Upper Silesia to Danzig. It is urged that: "It was no more possible to distinguish them than to draw a line between colours in a piece of shot silk. East Prussia projects into Polish territory. Danzig, a German town surrounded by Polish villages, stands sentry over the Vistula, the river that carries the commerce and therefore the life blood of Poland. In Upper Silesia, an area rich in coal, . . . it was not until 1921 that a dividing line was finally drawn." It is also deeply deplorable that the Teutons disdain and detest the Poles even more than they hate the French, and the placing under Polish dominion of a considerable German population created a resentment, more recently accentuated by Nazi propaganda, which has provided a pretext for the conquest and dismemberment of the Polish State.

Under the Treaty of Trianon, Austria surrendered 7½ million Slavs to Poland. The newly-created State was anxious to withdraw Warsaw from Russian contiguity as far as possible. For, having extirpated their own *bourgeoisie*, Bolshevik Russia invaded Poland. Brussilov commanded the Soviet forces and marched within a few miles of the Polish capital, when Pilsudski, acting under General Weygand's direction, conducted a counter offensive. This ended in the rout of the Russians, and the victorious and exulting Poles pursued the defeated Reds for more than 300 miles.

Subsequently, in 1920, a peace treaty was signed at Riga, which established the Russo-Polish frontier that remained intact until the recent Soviet invasion violated Poland, as a sequel to Hitler's ruthless warfare which practically conquered the country in a three weeks' campaign. Thus another titanic tragedy has been inscribed on the multitudinous blood-stained pages of the Newgate Calendar of history.

T. F. PALMER

## Carlyle and Laughter

The worst returns to laughter.—*King Lear*, Act iv., sc. i.

CARLYLE tells us, in *Sartor Resartus*, how Teufelsdröckh delighted in "contemplatively looking into the smoke of his tobacco pipe," and, that no matter what mood he happened to be in—introspective, prospective, or retrospective—the result was laughter—"not of the face and diaphragm only, but of the whole man from head to heel."

Carlyle was a great humourist. He was a man of an unbounded sympathy—the foundation of genuine humour. He had also a microscopic eye. And it was his possession of these two faculties that made possible those remarkable thumbnail sketches, with which his life of *Frederick the Great* abounds.

To him, therefore, no better indication of Teufelsdröckh's greatness was needed than the character of his laughter—"How much lies in laughter," he tells us, "the cipher key, wherewith we decipher the whole man! Some men wear an everlasting barren simper; in the smile of others lies a cold glitter as of ice: the fewest of all are able to laugh, what can be called laughing, but only sniff and titter and snigger from the throat outwards; or at best, produce some whistling, husky cachinnation, as if they were laughing through wool: of none such cases come good. The man who cannot laugh is not only fit for treasons stratagems and spoils; but his whole life is already a treason and a stratagem."

To Teufelsdröckh nothing was more provocative of mirth than the contemplation of clothing. Our garments were so shaken by his laughter that they fell to the ground, leaving us stark-naked. He was one of the first thinkers who sensed the significance of clothing. Tattooing, he says, came before clothing, and "the first purpose of clothes was not warmth or decency, but ornament." The truth of this is obvious—"The first spiritual want of a barbarous man is Decoration, as indeed we still see among the barbarous classes in civilized countries. Clothes which began in foolish love of ornament. What have they not become?"

The protest against clothing made by women generally, and by nudists and sun-bathers particularly, is so pronounced to-day that the dream of the Edinburgh tailor is like to be postponed *sine die*:—

"A day of justice, when the worth of Breeches would be revealed to man, and the scissors become for ever venerable."

The sage tells us how "man's earthly interests are all hooked and buttoned together, and held up by clothes." Draped firstly in swaddling clothes and lastly in a shroud, both garments void of pockets, our social dependence is forced upon us then, and when we are ill. It is only when we think, mistakenly, that we can achieve independence that the evil pocket springs into prominence. "How without clothes could we possess that master-organ—the soul's seat, and true pineal gland of the Body Social—a PURSE?" But the pocket, after all, is a passing ideal against which the pickpocket alone keeps vainly protesting.

Biblical references to clothing are interesting. Had we not sinned we might not have become conscious of our nakedness. When Adam and Eve sinned they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons (Gen. iii. 7) which must not have met with God's approval, for he "made coats of skins and clothed them" (v. 21). In Numbers xxxi. 24, the devout are advised: "Ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day." When feeling prophetic it seems to have been necessary to take off one's clothing (1 Sam. xix. 24). We have

probably the first notice of sun-bathing in Rev. xii. 1. In Rev. x. 1, we read of a mighty angel clothed with a cloud—a mighty cloud! Of Samuel, how his mother made him a little coat every year; of Joseph and his coat of colour; how in forty years wandering in the wilderness the clothes of the Israelites waxed not old upon them; how Goliath's coat of mail weighed 5,000 shekels (about twelve stone); how David slew an hundred Philistines to provide Saul, at his request, with raw material "to make a necklace," a wedding present for his daughter Michal (vide Voltaire) 1 Sam. xviii. 22; how David, girded only with a linen ephod, danced shamelessly before the Lord and others, with all his might, and how Michal despised him for doing so (2 Sam. vi. 16-20), and how when he was old and stricken in years they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. (1 Kings i. 1).

A good idea of the clothing in use, say, 3,000 years ago is given in Isaiah iii. The haughty walk of the daughters of Zion angered the Lord, and he threatened to smite them. Their clothing and ornaments had to be humbled too, and that nothing might be missed, the prophet put them on a list, see v. 18-24:—

"In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, the chains and the bracelets, and the mufflers, the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the ear-rings, the rings, and the nose jewels, the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well-set hair baldness; and burning instead of beauty." Even so was our "gentler sister woman" scanned by the Lord in those days.

A friend conversant with West Africa, from Bathurst to Lagos, tells me that "clothing has a very degrading influence physically and morally upon the native"; that a native chief had never been impressed by the majesty of Britain until he had seen a big-wigg'd judge; priest, judge, executioner, and conjuror, all of them needed the foreign aid of ornament to make their office tenable; a military dress made murder legal; the finding of a "big wigg'd, voluminous jaw'd" judge couldn't err; the clothing of the priest made him holy; and that the brawny natives he had seen, particularly in Kano, in all their pride of nakedness were honest, manly, generous fellows.

My friend went out to Africa in the interests of "Sooty Manchester . . . with its landlord interests, manufacturing interests, . . . and who knows what other interests, expediences, vested interests, inveterate Dilletantisms, Midas-eared Mammonisms." The vision of our sage was not blinded by all the City's "Ledgers, Supply and Demand Philosophies, and daily most melancholy business and cant," and soot. He saw through it all and warned the city magnates—"that stupidity ought to pause a little and consider."

"The above natives in Kano," says my friend, "convinced me that Carlyle and Emerson were right—that economy is a high, human office, a sacrament, when its aim is grand," and that the political economy of Manchester is all wrong. And that "as soon as there is faith, as soon as there is Society, comforts and cushions will be left to slaves."

Manchester is influenced, financially and religiously by the significance of clothing. Good business in the grey cloth trade means spread of Mohammedanism—to which grey cloth Christian merchants have been known to contribute. Good business done in the

coloured goods trade means an increase of Christian converts. A life solely devoted to business—money making—means either mental suicide, or childish stupidity. A better illustration of the latter truth could not be found than that given in *The Future of Nakedness* (pp.56-57) by John Langdon Davies. Of H. M. Stanley he writes:—

From 1874-1877 he wandered across the Dark Continent, suffering every hardship, braving every danger; then he went to England and made a notable speech to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. He told them how many natives there were on the Congo; he told them the fearful truth that they were all naked; he told them that their duty as Christians bade them convert these misguided native savages to Christianity and clothes; he told them that when this good work had progressed sufficiently to convince the natives of the need for wearing clothes on Sunday that would mean 320,000,000 yards of Manchester cloth yearly; and then the audience rose to its feet and cheered him and his good work to the echo. He went on still further, he told them of a time when the Christianizing influence would have progressed so far that the native would see the necessity of clothing their nakedness every day of the week; and he reckoned that that would mean £26,000,000 of purchases from Manchester per annum. There are 40,000,000 people, he concluded, beyond the gateway of the Congo, and the cotton spinners of Manchester are waiting to clothe them. Birmingham foundries are glowing with the red metal that will presently be made into ironwork for them and the trinkets that shall adorn their dusky bosoms, and the ministers of Christ are zealous to bring them, the poor benighted heathen, into the Christian fold.

How the Hard-headed Christian business men of Manchester left their brothers and sisters to die of starvation in the slums of that city, whilst eagerly supplying natives with clothing they did not need, may be not so well known to most as it was to Carlyle. But whether or no, the above quotation is enough

To move wild laughter in the throat of death.

GEORGE WALLACE

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## Acid Drops

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The Rev. Pat McCormick, who is advertised in *John Bull* as the "famous Radio Pastor," replies in that journal to the question, "Why does God allow War?" He says God doesn't, but he could if he would. But it appears that God, when he made man entered into some kind of a treaty by which "he limited his almightiness," and gave man free-will. What on earth this "famous radio pastor" understands by free-will is not stated, but it is evident that he is repeating a very ancient Christian stupidity, and something more modern might have been attempted. He does say that God behaves like "a good father (who) never forces his children to do the right thing," because "if he does they will never learn to do the right thing of their own accord." Another very ancient piece of religious question-begging. We don't know very much of the Rev. Pat McCormick, but however good as a preacher he is about as poor a reasoner as anyone we have come across for some time.

That seems rather harsh and "cock-sure." But, consider. God made man. He gave him all the qualities he has. The material of which man was made was God's creation. So when he gave "Free-will" he might also have given him enough judgment to lead him always in the right direction. A father is in no way responsible for

the material of which the child is made, and he has little responsibility for most of the things that lead his child to do what he ought not to do. So he has to make the best of the circumstances because he is not responsible for them. God sees man doing wrong and does nothing to prevent him. He just sits there and says theoretically, "I told you so, now you must pay for it." But not one parent in a thousand, if he saw his son doing something that was seriously wrong, and could prevent his doing that wrong would abstain from an act of prevention. The Rev. Pat should look up things; then he would find that if he sees a man committing a criminal offence, and he has the power to prevent it, but does not do so, on the same theory that we are told God acts, he may be charged with being an accessory to that offence. The right to restrain, forcibly, or otherwise, exists whether man has what the Rev. Pat calls "Free-will," (God only knows what he means by it) or not. And this right is both legal and moral.

If we are not taking the Rev. Pat into too deep water, let us put another consideration before him. The aim of ethical development is to produce a human being in whom right action is voluntary, and spontaneous. The man who has to reckon up whether he will lose or gain by an action is not a moral person at all. He is merely a man who has not the courage to take risks. There are plenty of burglars who will never break into a house while a policeman is on the other side of the road. But assuming there is no desire to do the wrong action at any time which involves a very high degree of moral development, it follows that the more decently we behave (providing that decency is due to spontaneous promptings of our nature) the less right we have to claim that we are behaving morally. In fact we cease to be moral in the moment of becoming so, or in the exact degree to which we become so.

We will not say more now, except to say that we feel certain that the problem is far too "knotty" for the Rev. Pat to handle, either in his pulpit, in *John Bull*, or if he pleases, in these columns. An answer—not a reply—to what we have said would require a greater understanding of ethics and psychology than the "famous radio pastor" appears to possess. But if he wishes to avail himself of these columns they are open to him.

The religious papers are rather interesting reading just now. It appears that

- God wants peace in Britain.
  - God wants peace in the United States.
  - God wants peace in the Balkan States.
  - God wants peace in France.
  - God wants peace all over the world, but
- HITLER WON'T LET HIM HAVE IT.

The *Christian World* is getting very sarcastic. In a recent issue it said, "It maybe, indeed, that the war has brought us all to a truer understanding of the meaning of prayer." We hope it has. That would at least prove that something good had been accomplished. For well over twelve months the whole of the Christian bodies have been praying that war might be averted. Now we are at war. So we hope that even a number of Christians have come to realize the meaning—and value—of prayer.

From sarcasm the *Christian World* turns to satire, thus. "We do gravely feel that God's blessing will surely rest upon that cause whose supporters most earnestly discover his will and . . . strive to realize it." But as we only know what God's will is by what he does, it looks as though we are at present in his black books. The *Christian World* will have to take greater care. Even believing Christians may kick at having their religion so completely exposed.

The Rev. George Evans also tries sarcasm. He says, "We live in a universe where God's power *unhindered* fulfils his purpose; we live in a world where God's will is hindered by the creature weakness, ignorance, and rebellion of man." Even Christians might well rebel against one of their own preachers poking fun at their faith. A god who would if he could, but can't because man won't let him does not seem of very much account. If by some accident Mr. Evans' congregation took to thinking about what their minister says there would be a devil of a row. But we imagine that Mr. Evans knows his people. He is a shepherd, and they are his sheep. An animal with longer ears might get obstinate.

Some of the writers on the *Liverpool Echo* ought to make themselves acquainted with what are easily known facts. In an article dated October 10, one of its writers says that an address by Hitler is all cant and humbug.

Finally capitulating (He is a Freethinker) into calling upon God, for the first time, I think in any of his speeches.

We should not feel very much upset if Hitler had been a member of the National Secular Society, for we have never seen any justification for holding that Christians had a monopoly of all the blackguards in the country. But it happens that the use of "God" and "Providence" is a very common feature of Hitler's speeches. He was bred a Roman Catholic, and has never disowned that creed. He has affirmed his belief that God sent him to save the German people. One is surprised at the editor passing such an obvious falsehood as the one cited. After all lying for the glory of God and killing his enemies are both common practices in Christian history.

Whether the deluge of prayer ordered recently by the Archbishop of Canterbury to be wafted to God Almighty is responsible for the "peace" offers made by Hitler on his own and his fellow gangsters' behalf, we cannot say for certain; but there can be no question that these "peace" offers, even if they are God-inspired, are bitterly opposed by most Christian people—to say nothing, of course, of other people. In any case, we seem to have read singularly little of this wonderful day of "intercession," or what God did, or ought to have done, about it. Have the prayers brought about no results? Is God truly as dumb in this war as he was in the last?

The *Catholic Times* advises a "League of Prayer," which shall address its petitions, not to God direct, but to Mary begging this "most gracious advocate" to intercede with God on behalf of peace, etc., etc. Now if Mary was the wife of God, we might see wisdom in the selected advocate, for in the majority of cases a husband will give in to a wife if the attack is sustained. But according to the Christian mythology Mary was only a kind of a daughter-in-law of God and the influence may not be so strong as that of even a kind of a wife, so that a petition does not look as certain to have the effect desired by the *Catholic Times*. Besides, may it not be that God may get angry and ask why these petitions could not be directed direct to him? God has been shut out of so much of late years that he may well take offence at this extension of the policy of encirclement.

The *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Charlottesville, U.S.A.), quoted by *P.T.O.*, has the following interesting comment on Free Speech in England:—

In the twelve months ended June, 1937, there were 320 prosecutions for alleged offences in connexion with public meetings or demonstrations; and there were more prosecutions in the fifteen years following the end of the Great War in 1919 for the expression of opinions disliked by the British Government than in the fifty years preceding the outbreak of war.

Now more than ever is the necessity for that eternal vigilance which is the price one must pay for guarding our

precious heritage. Bureaucracy in England has never been more rampant—from the lowest grade of so-called Government work to the highest paid Government "Director"—than is the case at the moment. Free speech can easily be lost for ever.

It is strange that in counting up the war casualties to date, no one has considered the wounds inflicted upon such staunch Sabbatarians as Sir Thomas Inskip and his gallant band of those who sigh for a solemn Sunday. We went to war on a Sunday, when it might as well have been Saturday night or Monday morning. Parliament has sat on Sunday, soldiers have been drilled on Sunday, our airmen have gone about their work in France on Sunday, even the huge army of funk-hole Lilliputian Dictators that we have issue orders on Sunday, with never a complaint from those loyal supporters in and out of Parliament, who have protested against men and women being permitted to play games in public on Sunday. But let us be just, even to these representatives of the Stone Age. They have protested against cinemas being open for soldiers on Sunday, and a kind of side-branch of these has formed a "moral battalion" made up of men and women. The distinction here is purely physiological—to prowl round in the blackout in order to have the pleasure of discovering the gross immorality that prevails whether it is there or not. If it is not, there is a great satisfaction in thinking about it. With these exceptions Sir Thomas Inskip and his followers have surrendered unconditionally.

When one thinks of it, however, this is following the usual course. To take some events. One of Marlborough's greatest battles was fought on Sunday, so also was Waterloo. Cromwell also fought one of his principal battles on Sunday, Sunday was one of the days for fighting during the last war. We are continuing it in this one. No civilian seems less afraid of air-raids on Sunday than he is on week-days, and even the B.B.C., instead of employing a few more parsons to preach to us on Sunday, calmly repeats its war-news—often late, and which might as well be kept till Monday, as it usually appears in Saturday night's papers. But how can we reasonably hope to win the war if we go on desecrating the Sabbath in this way? There are limits to the patience of God.

We are now waiting patiently for (a) the bullet that deflected from a soldier who carries a Bible in his breast pocket, (b) the dying Atheist soldier who sends for the Padre to say prayers over him, (c) the leading officers—French or British—who always say prayers before a battle, and (d) the soldier who has a "mystical" sense of being lifted up by angels at a critical moment. The time is about due for their arrival.

It is as well that we should note the exact reality of the opposition to Hitlerism on the part of the religious world. The following, from the *Catholic Times*, a journal recently "blessed" by the Pope bears eloquent testimony to Catholic ideas of why we are at war:—

It is no part of the policy of the *Catholic Times* to take part in any war propaganda—nor to repeat stories just because they are detrimental to the armies against which Great Britain and France are fighting. We report war events only in so far as they have a direct Catholic interest. The fate of Catholic Poland was one that closely touched our interests.

The Nazi attack on the lives, freedom and homeland of its inoffensive neighbours, and its persecution of dissentient opinions at home, and its cruel and often bestial treatment of Jews as Jews, leaves Catholics cold. To quote the Biglow Papers:—

I don't believe in principles,  
But, Oh! I do in interest.

How Nazi "Kultur" is being furthered by the present regime in Germany can be seen by a few facts published in *P.T.O.*, taken from information gathered in a Paris weekly from German sources. It appears that novels by Nazi writers are not being translated in any foreign language—German literature, which is published abroad, being the work of refugees. This is the case in Germany's axis partner, Italy, where a large proportion of the German works published were written by exiles. Since 1933 no German play has been produced abroad, and even German films have suffered a severe fall-back. Actually, in 1937, Germany sold 79 films abroad, but only 24 in 1938. Contrast this with 1932, when no fewer than 142 full-length films were produced in Germany. Real German culture has had to pay and is paying very dearly for Hitler.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool says, "We do not want new, or altered principles." Of course not! When did the Roman Church want anything new that was worth having? It never wanted the earth to go round the sun, or the abolition of burning for heresy, or the theory of evolution, or the abolition of witchcraft, of hell, or the blasphemy laws, or the worship of relics. There are quite a number of good things the Church did not want, and nearly all of them were things that developing common sense found most acceptable. But, there, even a Roman Catholic Archbishop cannot help dropping into the truth now and again.

A columnist in the *New York Daily* informs us that the Rev. John Brown of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, delivers his sermons with a boy, Charlie McCarthy, on his knee, "to hold the interest of his congregation." It is possible in these degenerate days that this artful attempt to interfere with the congregation's habit of taking a nap during the sermon will be bitterly resented, and the last state of the Rev. John Brown will be worse than the first.

## Twenty Five Years Ago

In the course of a fine article on "Thoughts on This War" in *Scribner's*, Mr. John Galsworthy has the following scathing indictment of Christianity:—

Three hundred thousand church spires raised to the glory of Christ! Three hundred million human creatures baptised into His service! And—war to the death of them all! "I trust the Almighty God to give the victory to my arms!" "Let your hearts beat to God, and your fists in the face of the enemy!" "In prayer we call God's blessing on our valiant troops!"

God on the lips of each potentate, and under the hundred thousand spires prayer that twenty-two million servants of Christ may receive from God the blessed strength to tear and blow each other to pieces, to ravage and burn, to wrench husbands from wives, fathers from their children, to starve the poor, and everywhere destroy the works of the spirit! Prayer under the hundred thousand spires for the blessed strength of God, to use the noblest, most loyal instincts of the human race to the ends of carnage! "God be with us to the death and dishonour of our foes" (whose God he is no less than ours)! The God who gave His only begotten Son to bring on earth peace and good will toward men!

No creed—in these days when two and two are put together—can stand against such reeling subversion of its foundation. After this monstrous mockery, beneath this grinning skull of irony, how shall there remain faith in a religion preached and practised to such ends?

Inevitable or avoidable, in defence of national freedom or in pursuit of schemes of national aggrandisement, the indubitable fact remains that Christianity has done nothing to make such a conflict as the present one impossible, and has done much to make it sooner or later certain.

**To get a New Subscriber is to make a New Friend**



**"Jubilee Freethinker Fund"**

*Corrections*—21s. acknowledged to C. M. Hollingham should have been 20s. only. £10 to "Cine Cere" should be £10 10s.. Letter received from H. Reeve did not contain the postal order indicated.

We print below the second list of subscriptions to the Jubilee *Freethinker* Fund, and everyone will agree that we have no cause for complaint. All those who are inclined to help causes with which they sympathize have been heavily taxed during the past three years, and our appeal comes at a time when many have almost reached the end of their tether. But we never had any doubt of the loyalty and generosity of those who have the welfare of this journal at heart, and our confidence has been justified. We can quote from but a few of the letters received, mainly because they are of too personal a character. To some of these we have replied personally, and we can assure all concerned that their confidence in our being able to guide the *Freethinker* through troubled waters is very encouraging.

We are, however, informed that some of our well-wishers have expressed a doubt as to whether we can repeat our task of 1914-18. All we can say is that short of landing a German Army, and putting Oswald Mosley in command, provision has been made for every reasonable contingency. Of course, among the things on which we are counting is the continued help and confidence of our friends. But we are not foolish enough to do anything that will jeopardize the latter. It is our greatest asset. Some grumble at our putting aside the proposal that Freethinkers should be given an opportunity of signaling their appreciation of our completing fifty years of Freethinking propaganda. We are getting it in the subscriptions to this fund. Besides, in another nine years, sixty years may be celebrated, and in forty-nine a centenary will be registered.

There have been many enquiries about our health. We can assure everybody that we are feeling better than we have felt for some time. Circumstances have supplied a tonic that could not be bettered. This rather—at present—lady-like kind of a war has done the trick.

An old friend, Mr. H. Irving writes:—

How you are going to meet rising costs and other things it is hard to see. You are going to meet them as they arise. Everything fitting your philosophy. The last encounter found you with a constitution well fitted for a big struggle, and your constitution won, but the handicap is bigger now. I hope you won't have to turn yourself this time into a waste-paper merchant in order to get news sheets. You have enough on hand without that.

We don't know what we may become, if the war is a lengthy one. But we will "wait and see."

A very much appreciated subscription of one shilling comes from one who signs himself "Old Age Pensioner," with a promise to repeat it every month. We wish we knew who he was. But we are sure he will not misunderstand us if we say that although that gift is more valuable than diamonds there is no need for him to tax his poor resources as he suggests. We value his letter very much indeed.

Mr. F. E. Monks writes: "Above all we must keep the *Freethinker* going, and I know that you will see to it. But we must all do our bit. The paper and its outlook is in these times more important than ever." Mr. T. Robson thinks, "It is disappointing that you cannot be freed from these recurring financial worries because of passing circumstances, but then without a few to keep you company you would be feeling lonely, what a dull world (with no other to look forward to)

if this were empty of obstacles to be overcome." There seems some sound philosophy in that. But, after all, we have not to face greater troubles than other Freethinkers who have been at the head of affairs.

Another member of the Old Guard, Mr. J. Close, thanks us for our "great work," which "deserves recognition." Mr. R. Daniell, a reader of nearly fifty year's standing, says, "I hope time will deal gently with you so that *Freethinker* readers may have the satisfaction and pleasure of your being at the helm for many years." We have no fault to find with time, except that it has a habit of running on. In any case we shall wear it out, one day. Mr. S. Carlile sends his appreciation of the *Freethinker*.

(Miss) Frances Warne welcomes "the opportunity of expressing gratitude for all I have learned in the two or three years since I first saw the *Freethinker*. Mr. W. T. Newman thinks that "with so much ill-informed chatter about it is a decided mental tonic to read your 'Views and Opinions.'"

We are obliged to hold over other comments until next week.

	£	s.	d.
Previously acknowledged (corrected)	173	18	6
W. Nelson ... ..	25	0	0
F. Edwin Monks ... ..	5	5	0
Dr. A. R. Niven ... ..	1	1	0
Herbert Wood ... ..	0	5	0
V. H. Smith ... ..	0	10	0
W. Mealor ... ..	0	5	0
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C. Potter ... ..	0	7	6
Old Age Pensioner ... ..	0	1	0
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Frank Gubbins ... ..	2	10	0
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D. C. Drummond ... ..	1	0	0
E. D. Side ... ..	2	2	0
R. B. Harrison ... ..	0	10	0
Adrian and Christopher Brunel ... ..	0	5	0
W. T. Newman ... ..	0	5	0
E. Swale ... ..	0	15	0
E. Dunsford ... ..	0	5	0
A. H. (Golders Green) ... ..	0	2	0
R. Daniell ... ..	0	5	0
Miss I. Dixon ... ..	0	2	6
Mrs. Auguste Forrer ... ..	10	0	0
H. Irving ... ..	0	5	0
Alan Tyndal ... ..	0	5	0
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F. A. Hornibrook ... ..	2	2	0
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Mrs. Wood ... ..	0	12	0
C. D. Weston ... ..	0	10	6
A. Heal ... ..	1	1	0
T. Smith ... ..	1	0	0
H. W. Rayment ... ..	0	10	0
W. Griffiths ... ..	1	0	0
A. E. Reilly ... ..	1	1	0
S. G. Gray ... ..	0	2	0
T. H. Woodliffe ... ..	0	10	6
A Fifty-Seven Year Reader ... ..	0	2	6
D. Penfold ... ..	1	1	0
Green Ink (Name omitted) ... ..	0	5	0
E. Lynden ... ..	1	2	0

R. Lewis	...	...	...	...	0	10	0
M. Felden	...	...	...	...	0	10	6
E. M. Sandys	...	...	...	...	1	1	0
Total					£256	5	6

The above represents sums received up to and including October 16. We shall be obliged if errors either in names or amounts are pointed out.

CHAPMAN COHEN

## THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

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Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

### TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- C. A. MORRISON AND A. HANSON.—The passage from Mark Twain has already appeared in these columns, but can be used again.
- C. M. HOLLINGHAM.—Thanks for letter.
- W. WRIGHT.—Pleased to hear from you. Regards to your wife.
- J. BOWLES.—Pleased to know that the article cleared your mind with regard to Agnosticism.
- G. H. PEATE.—Pleased to know the pleasure you had in reading the articles of Mr. Standfast. We have no illusions concerning the imperfections of our "Democracy." We cannot claim to be a representative democracy with a hereditary second chamber. But let us regard ourselves as working to maintain the right to create a true democracy in this country, and the position looks rather different.
- L. EDWARDS.—Put the position in this way; allowing for all the fairly obvious trickery, chicanery, and defects of the English electoral system, would you prefer one similar to that which exists in Russia, Germany and Italy, where only members of one party are allowed to stand for election? The need for improvement in our electoral system is great, but the abolition of it, and the adoption of another, where the possibility of a candidate being ruled out on account of his opinions is quite another question.
- MRS. WOOD.—Thanks for cheery letter.
- MISS I. DIXON.—Very pleased to hear from a new reader. We hope you will continue long enough to be an old one.
- W. H. BALLAST.—We have read your letter with pleasure. Hope to have you on our list of readers for many more years.
- W. A. WILLIAMS.—Obliged for report. May deal with it later. Too many other things in hand this week.
- T. J. SNAITH.—Pleased to have your friend's high opinion of this journal. Thanks for what you have done to gain new readers.
- E. W. FLINT (Auckland).—We never expect all our readers to agree with us in everything, we only ask them to consider what we say, and then form an opinion of their own. We are familiar with the atrocities committed by every Government in the world—which includes our own—and have said so in much stronger language than your own. Our faith in the infallibility of Governments is very weak indeed. It is the unique threat of Fascism to the right of a people to mould their own Government, and, as we have shown, the setting up of a form of dictatorship which in its very nature must threaten the possibility of other people deciding their own form of Government that is fronting us today. The relative rascalities of Governments is quite another matter.
- W. POWELL.—We agree with you that the problem before the world to-day is that of distribution rather than production. We also agree that the problem of the criminal is that of creating conditions where crime would appear mainly as a pathological condition, or a reversion to a lower social stage. We agree with Beccaria, the great Freethinking writer of the eighteenth century, that Society itself is usually one of the partners in whatever crime exists.
- A. W. DAVIS.—You will find an article on the subject in this issue. Perhaps you would care to repeat your comments apropos of what is said there.
- (MRS.) A. HEAL.—Thanks for your compliments. Hope we

deserve some of them. One has only to run up against religious prejudice to discover that the "dead horse" is very much alive.

"ZETA."—A fitting reply to one who has not risen above the foolish question, "Which came first, the hen or the egg," is to ask another—"Does anyone really believe that God laid the first egg?" If he gets over that, ask him to look up the biological significance of "egg."

F. GRYSER.—Thanks, but it is far too lengthy for publication.

R. LEWIS.—Much obliged for cuttings.

II. V. CRECCH, FRED HOLDEN, J. H. BOWLES, F. WHITEHOUSE, G. F. HART and G. TAYLOR.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.

WM T. NICHOLAS.—Your kind wishes are heartily reciprocated.

F. C. HOLDEN.—Papers sent as instructed, clearly marked, on 13th inst. Thanks.

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

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

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

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

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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

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

### Sugar Plums

On Sunday next, October 22, Mr. Cohen will speak in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Visitors from a distance will please bear in mind that the meeting commences at 3 o'clock. This will give people time to get home before the blackout is at its blackest.

We have had a few more complaints of subscribers not receiving their copies of the *Freethinker*. The wholesale agents now do not take copies of any paper beyond those actually ordered. Readers should therefore place their orders and see that they receive copies. Where copies are not received we will replace them, free, if they had already been ordered. But we hope that they will give us all the help they can in securing a regular supply. Where the fault lies with the newsagents, we should be glad to have full particulars. We can then deal with the matter.

The following is part of a letter sent us by Mr. A. Harris:—

Last week I applied to enlist in the Royal Air Force. I was asked to fill up the usual form of attestation on which Question 12 reads: "What is your Religious Denomination?" I pointed out to the Recruiting Officer that I was not a member of any Religious Denomination, but he informed me that it would not be permitted to say so in answer to Question 12. He also informed me that membership of some Christian Denomination is compulsory in the Fighting Forces. I asked if I could call myself a "Freethinker." The answer was again in the negative.

It then transpired that it was impossible for me to serve my country unless I either made a false statement or, in order to avoid doing so, joined some Religious Denomination to whose views I am directly and violently opposed.

I was in quite a quandary as to how I should act, until

finally I was rejected in the medical examination, and so the difficulty was overcome.

A. F. HARRIS,

We are sending a copy of this to the War Office. It is scandalous that a man who wishes to join the Army shall, through the ignorance or bigotry of an official, be deprived of his legal rights and invited, or forced, to make a false statement. We are sending a copy of the relevant portions of the letter to the War Office and await a reply. It is time that the War Office instructed these military ignoramuses of the legal rights of the men who volunteer for service, instead of inducing them to start their military career with an unnecessary lie.

## On the Religion of Shakespeare Again

It is to be hoped that the tragic days through which we are passing will not take away our minds entirely from some of, for want of a better term I must call, the "spiritual" things of life. After all music, art, literature, and poetry, still exist—they are the eternal verities, and in these days are more necessary than ever. At all events I am going to make no apology for recurring to a subject which has always fascinated me, and from the fact that it has so often been dealt with in these columns, has also fascinated others. The religion of Shakespeare is one of those questions which is always interesting to discuss as a problem in literature, but it is a problem which touches Freethought as well.

Both Wheeler and Poote were convinced that whatever Shakespeare believed, it was not in religion. Whether he was what one could call an Atheist was another matter for many Atheists—so-called—of the period were perhaps not Atheists at all in our sense of the word. Raleigh was certainly accused of Atheism, but it is hard to believe that he ever made a clear, unequivocal declaration that he did not believe in any God whatever. Marlowe probably did this, but one never knows how much to believe from the testimony of an informer. At all events, we do know that Thomas Paine was accused of being an Atheist, when nobody could have made his belief in a God more crystal-clear than he in the *Age of Reason*.

Now in the case of Shakespeare, that is, the man of Stratford, we know so little about him that it is utterly impossible to say anything whatever about his religious beliefs from any remains of himself. He may have become an adherent of the reformed religion, or he may have always believed in Roman Catholicism, the religion of his ancestors, if not of his father. There certainly was a large section of the population in England then which had not gone over to the Reformers. In that pioneer work, Birch's *Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Shakespeare*, published in 1848, a searching enquiry is made into the plays as the only source of information as to what Shakespeare really thought on the subject. Charles Knight, one of the ablest of early Shakespearean scholars, had, of course, no doubt whatever that Shakespeare was religious. He said—Birch gives the quotation on his title page:—

Doubts have been entertained as to Shakespeare's religious belief, because few or no notices of it occur in his works. This ought to be attributed to a tender and delicate reserve about holy things, rather than to inattention or neglect.

But there were others who were by no means so certain that Shakespeare was religious, like Gifford and Samuel Johnson; and even lesser known writers were

shrewd enough to note that if the thoughts and beliefs of a man can be seen in his works certainly the great dramatist had precious little belief. Birch quotes the author of the life of Shakespeare in that famous old series (and still valuable by the way) *Lardner's Cyclopaedia*:—

We may add that his (Shakespeare's) allusions in other respects, are in the highest degree censurable. As a late admirable writer (Gifford) has said of him, he "is in truth the Coryphaeus of profanation." Texts of scripture are adduced by him with the most wanton levity; and like his own Hal, he has led to damnable iteration."

The plays of Shakespeare show not only an acquaintance with the Bible, or at least, a familiarity with some texts, but also a great knowledge of classical and foreign literature as far as it was possible in that early age of printing. Birch points out Shakespeare "was certainly well acquainted with the two most irreligious authors known to his times," Boccaccio and Montaigne; as well as with Lucretius, Plutarch, Aristophanes, Lucian and Ovid. It is to these he went chiefly and not to Christian writers and divines when he wished to quote. In an age when the religious question was the foremost of all, when the struggle between the two sects of Christianity was at its fiercest, Shakespeare turned away from religious speculations, and dealt with men and women, their passions, and hopes, and fears, and most invariably treated the whole question of religion with contempt.

I do not intend to give extracts from the plays in proof of this contention; they have so often been given. But I should like instead to take a point of view which seems exceedingly unpopular with many Freethinkers.

It is extraordinary that nowadays people can listen with perfect equanimity to any attack on Christianity, and will even admit that those of us who claim there never was such a person as Jesus may be right; and yet directly a sceptic on the identity of the writer of Shakespeare's plays dares to say openly that he does not believe that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote a line of them, he lays himself open, if not to the bitterest attacks, at least to the "contempt" of all "well-read" people; and this is often the case from those who claim to be identified with Freethought. Even John M. Robertson himself, who did so much to establish the non-historicity of Jesus, came nearer to losing his temper with the unfortunate Shakespearean sceptic than with any Christian.

For my part I take these attacks with a smile, for I am perfectly convinced that, whoever wrote the plays of Shakespeare, it could only have been a man with classical knowledge and learning, a man thoroughly versed in court procedure, in law, and an aristocrat to his finger tips. And William Shakespeare had none of these.

For long it was the most learned man of his day that was put forward as the rightful author—Francis Bacon; but during the past few years the claims of that strange Elizabethan, Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, have been urged more and more by a group of serious students. In the pioneer work of J. Thomas Leonard, *Shakespeare Identified* (1920) will be found some arguments which, so far as I have studied the question, have never been answered; and interested readers will find in the books of Mr. Percy Allen a discussion of the problem which will perhaps surprise them if they know nothing of what has been discovered during the past few years relative to de Vere. The official life of the Earl of Oxford is by Captain B. M. Ward, written over ten years ago, but some of the views expressed therein may require alteration in the light of recent discoveries.

For us Freethinkers the real question must be this:

If the plays of Shakespeare show unmistakably the almost complete scepticism of their author, and if Edward de Vere is put forward as the rightful author of the plays, then he must have been also at the least a sceptic; he may even have been an Atheist. Do the recent discoveries about him confirm this?

Both Looney and Ward deal with the question of the religion of de Vere. The former says that "to deduce the dramatist's religious point of view from his plays is perhaps the most difficult task of all." But he quotes Macaulay to show that the author of the plays had little sympathy for Protestantism, and concludes that if de Vere had any religion at all it was a leaning towards Roman Catholicism but touched with scepticism. He adds, however, that "amongst the charges made against him by one adversary was that of irreligion: the name 'atheist' being given him by another (State Papers)." This is particularly interesting because in his life of Oxford, Capt. Ward shows that de Vere was secretly reconciled to the Roman Catholic Church when he was about 31, but "had publicly recanted" when he was 32.

As I have already said, however, much has been found out about the Earl of Oxford since Ward wrote in 1928, and the following extract from his article in the *Shakespeare Fellowship News Letter* for April of this year should prove illuminating:—

There are some people who want to make out that Oxford was a sort of Sir Galahad and Little Lord Fauntleroy rolled into one: a teetotaler, vegetarian, non-smoker; who went to church once on week-days and three times on Sundays; who always turned the other cheek when attacked; and went about with his head encircled with a permanent halo. I wholly disagree. I think Oxford, in addition to his many stirring qualities and his supremacy as a poet and master of languages was full of human frailties, given to bouts of drunkenness, quick tempered and quarrelsome, a thoroughly bad husband, an atheist, and had from time to time fallen into the temptation of other vices. I know this view is not popular, but I can't help that. It happens to be true, which is more important than a lot of smug wishful-thinking and snivelling sentimentalism. Moreover, no one in his senses believes that the author of the Sonnets was a little plaster saint. On the contrary, he definitely says he is not. The plays are full of the seamy side of life, and I defy anyone to write about the seamy side of life without having had, at least, some experience of it.

No one indeed can read the plays of Shakespeare without coming to the conclusion that their author had had a vast experience of the seamy side of life—a point of view recently expressed to me by a friend who, on a bed of sickness, had occasion to re-read some of the plays very carefully. A poet himself and an extremely able critic, he tried to make the point that Oxford could never have written them because he could never, as an aristocrat, have lived the seamy life. And the answer is that that was just the life de Vere had lived; while there was no evidence whatever that William Shakespeare of Stratford had done so.

Whoever wrote the plays then is, on the authority of competent critics, if not a genuine Atheist in our sense of the term, at least a genuine sceptic. He was a Humanist and a Freethinker also; and that means that the greatest of all writers, the supreme literary genius of the world, was on our side.

## II. CUTNER

Every noble life leaves the fibre of it interwoven with the work of the world.—*Ruskin.*

Otto-of-roses is good, but wild air is better.

*Emerson.*

## Nature or Nurture?

THE view that certain peoples are culturally more fitted than others to populate and govern the world is not new, and we are again living in a day when warfare is used as a means to this end, in the belief that a chosen people is justified in enforcing its rule on others. If in these times when feeling is running high we can strike out from serious consideration all "Aryan" pretensions, we shall perhaps be better fitted to give the theory itself a calmer hearing, having divorced it from the disgusting and barbaric form which it has taken and in which it now appears.

What follows has been suggested chiefly by J. B. S. Haldane's *Heredity and Politics*, and L. T. Hogben's *Nature and Nurture*, and what I propose to attempt is rather different from a review. The two names carry their own recommendation, and there is no need for eulogy. I shall have occasion to match them with other learned investigators and inquirers who have written on genetics and eugenics, with the theory of racial superiority as the logical extension.

In his work, *The Inequality of Man* (and other essays), Prof. Haldane states definitely, as a worker in biological fields, that men are not born equal, and in *Heredity and Politics*, quotes Engels, "The real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the demand for the abolition of classes. Any demand for equality which goes beyond that of necessity passes into absurdity."

Even this, nevertheless, goes beyond the Jeffersonian conception of equality at the American Declaration of Independence, which resulted principally in legal equality.

\* \* \*

The differences between individuals are partly inherited and partly acquired through the environment (including the pre-natal environment, which has of late begun to appear much more important than was once thought). It is thus most useful to discover as exactly as possible what is inherited and what acquired through conditions, social, material and educational. For some years shrewdly conceived intelligence tests have been carried out on school children, the army, navy and other groups, chiefly in U.S.A., Britain and Western Europe. Drs. Cyril Burt and Ballard have here been notable investigators.

In his book, *Eugenics* (first print 1926) Prof. A. M. Carr-Saunders has tabulated plenty of statistics calculated to facilitate a comparison between the intelligence standards of school children respectively from what he terms poor and superior schools. By "poor" he means a poor district, the children being recruited from families where the income is low. Their intelligence was systematically of a much poorer standard than that of children "drawn from families ranking among the best which send their children to an elementary school." The category "better class children" is vague, and, freeing Carr-Saunders from responsibility for the following description, I would ascribe the term to those children showing superiorities in (1) physical cleanliness, (2) mental cleanliness, (3) physical stature, (4) intelligence (mental stature). The correlation of these is close enough to warrant comparison and some terminology of comparison. To denounce such comparison as dictated by "snobishness" is to put in a well-intentioned plea on behalf of the bottom dog merely at the expense of obscuring facts. And if I may anticipate a little at a later stage of the discussion, pertaining to the diffusion of population, the condition termed "low income" might be more appropriately rendered, "low income per child."

Carr-Saunders' figures could be supported from other and later sources, as well as the correlation with

physical stature and general health. There is such overwhelming evidence that children from "poor" schools are the less intelligent that anyone who brings up individual instances to disprove the contention may at once be ruled out of order.

The Freethinker will avoid dogmatism, but he will also guard facts as sacred.

\* \* \*

But is not the environment transmitted? Have we been measuring environment and not heredity? Are we merely measuring the physical substratum? Is the contrast in intelligence the result of social and economic conditions? Are we, after all, dealing with nurture, not nature?

Or is it something truly connected with the genes of heredity?

Given two bow-legged dogs, one may be the result of nurture (improper or inadequate food, giving rickets), and the other the result of nature (a *daschlund*). Amphibian neoteny can be genetic or ecological (conditioned by the environment). Metamorphosis is normally conditioned by the liberation of the thyroid secretion. If the tadpole is deprived of iodine, which is used by the thyroid to effect the change, or if it is actually deprived of the thyroid, it remains in either case permanently larval. Neoteny is here ecological. It is hereditary in the case of *Amblystoma tigrinum*, an American newt which has a characteristically larval state, because it inherits a deficient thyroid, and therefore cannot utilize the surrounding iodine. (Thyroid feeding will, of course, here remedy the defects of inheritance).

Much progress has been achieved, and reported by Hogben and Haldane, in the study of differences, with a view to finding whether they are genetically or environmentally conditioned. This is done by studying heredity divorced from environmental effects, and environment divorced from hereditary effects. Nature and nurture have been experimentally separated and studied in isolation. This is done by the elimination, by neutralizing, of one of these two factors.

A "Pure Line," for example, is obtained by self-fertilizing in plants, in quick-breeding low forms of life such as *Drosophila funebris*. It can also eventually be achieved by sib-mating (continuous brother and sister unions). In a Pure Line the differences will be entirely due to nurture, the hereditary gene constitution being brought to stability. (Sib-mating is, of course, quite possible in a healthy stock. The Pharaohs of Egypt appear to have carried on this form of marriage through one dynasty after another). In a Pure Line hereditary differences have, as it were, been flattened out, so as to affect all alike by giving each individual the same genetic constitution. This applies also to a "clone," vegetative reproduction from the same seedling. The resulting uniformity means that selection is ineffective and differences are not transmitted.

In man the hereditary factor is neutralized and eliminated from consideration by *asexual* reproduction (the monozygotic twin). This is truly reproduction without the agency of sex. Fraternal twins are merely like ordinary sibs, being from different eggs, but monozygotic twins result from an early division of the embryo. Coming from the same fertilized egg they have the same set of genes and, of course, the same sex. These "identical twins," as they have been called, were first studied by Sir F. Galton.

They have the same nature. By "nature" is meant (a) heredity, (b) segregation (heritable differences due to chance combinations of genes, giving variation) and (c) mutation, if any (the substitution of genes for those already present, or the damaging of genes). In each of these respects monozygotic twins start with an identical equipment.

Haldane quotes a case of one pair who, though hundreds of miles apart, ran away from their jobs at the same moment, and had acute appendicitis on almost the same day. Out of thirteen investigated cases, ten pairs imitated very closely, and from the knowledge available Carr-Saunders concludes that "this again is evidence that the social environment produces no great differences between persons."

The reverse condition is where the environment is as nearly as possible the same for all individuals. We can then study heredity in isolation. "Take orphanages, for example. The social environment is much the same for all. The observed differences between the inmates must be due in the main to inherited differences. Further it has been found by Prof. Pearson [Karl Pearson] that the correlation between children of the same parents brought up in an orphanage is approximately similar to the correlation between children of the same parents who have been sent to different schools by their parents. Not only, therefore, do mental differences appear where the social environment is the same for all, but these differences are of the same degree as where the social environment is diverse. These and other similar considerations make it appear that though we cannot remove acquirements when judging intelligence, the acquirements remaining can be responsible only to a small degree for the differences" (Carr-Saunders). So far as bodily differences are concerned he maintains that heredity accounts for at least 90 per cent.

Haldane, too, regards environment as having but a limited field of operation, and in this he opposes the extreme behaviorist. Genetics gives a rude shock to behaviorist psychology, which in its extreme form is equality run mad.

Babies are easy material on which to graft conditioned responses, because, so Haldane maintains, their nerve fibres in the upper part of the brain have not yet got sheaths of an oily substance called myelin, which probably acts as an insulator. When insulation is complete, mental differences due to brain structure can evolve.

If, then, we care to assume that the acquisition of a position of economic security is statistically—mark the word—correlated with intelligence, the results of school tests would appear to indicate strongly that intelligence is an heritable quality.

Even more demonstrable is the inheritance of certain defects, including mental deficiency. With these it is hoped to deal later.

G. H. TAYLOR

## Correspondence

### THE MEANING OF AGNOSTICISM

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I know it is dangerous for a third person to interfere even in the most amicable of arguments, but I cannot refrain from offering a little comment on the discussion between Mr. Du Cann and yourself. In your article in your issue for October 8, you state with admirable clarity the position as you see it, and I am not for one moment disputing your own intellectual position in the matter. But suppose the Agnostic puts the problem like this: "There may be a personal power behind the universe as we experience it. I frankly don't know whether there is or not. I don't suppose that I shall know, for evidence, either for or against, is completely lacking. The world may have a meaning, or it may be completely meaningless. In any case, if it has a meaning, that meaning is too deep for the mind of any being inside that universe to grasp." What is your comment then?

I do not ask this question in any contentious spirit, but purely because, like Miss Dartle, I want to know. I have carefully avoided the word "God," so that there

shall be no confusion of the issue by the introduction of Jehovah, Jupiter, or any other human-made deity. That there is a mystery behind everything in the universe is surely crystal-clear. And, in my humble opinion, the Agnostic who, when asked, "What is the answer to the riddle of the universe?" frankly says, "I don't know," is occupying the most rational position—far more so than the man who denies that the riddle exists.

JOHN ROWLAND

[We suggest to Mr. Rowland the desirability of his trying to give a definite meaning to such expressions as "There may be a *personal power behind the universe* as we experience it." "The world may have a *meaning*, or it may be *meaningless*." "If it has a meaning, that *meaning is too deep for the mind of any being inside the universe*." "That there is a *mystery behind everything* in the universe is surely crystal-clear." I suggest that Mr. Rowland tries to explain these words and phrases—first the words, then the phrases—and tries to discover whether they *mean* anything at all. To us they suggest a badly bungled rationalizing of the Athanasian Creed. But we think we can confidently defy even a Roman Catholic theologian to give any significance to the terms as Mr. Rowland uses them. Words must carry some significance if they are to be used with profit.—C.C.]

#### FASCISM AND LIVING SPACE

SIR,—In your issue of October 8 you say: "The last, and fatal, move for us would be to leave Fascism in power."

I fear that does not carry us very far, for even if we killed every Fascist in Germany, and established an ideally perfect democratic government, that would not prevent the installation of another dictatorship as soon as our backs were turned. Surely the history of the last twenty years must have taught us that. Twenty years ago we crushed "Prussian militarism," and established a democracy in one of the most highly-educated countries of the world; yet we are again fighting Prussian militarism under a new name.

The same thing has been happening in many other countries. A few years ago Italy, Spain, Portugal and Austria had almost perfect democratic constitutions. Where are they to-day?

The truth is that the old enthusiasm for democracy no longer exists. Democracy has not given results. Moreover, the whole world can see that even a Socialist revolution in Russia has not done much for the Russian people.

The minds of men are now moving on other lines. The most attractive doctrine of the day is that of the importance of living space. Even before the last war this idea was gaining ground. The French historian, Jacques Bainville says:—

"Germany wanted war. She had too many men. She was, as in the ancient times of history, impelled to invade her neighbours. . . . Germany, with an excessive population and industry, was pushed to the conquest of outlets and territories, the desire for which acted as much on the Socialist masses as on the upper classes." (*Histoire de France*, pp. 541, 547).

The German Socialists are studious men. They learnt from statistics that even if the national income were distributed with absolute equality, it would make little difference. An equal distribution of the total product of Italy and Japan would leave every inhabitant of those countries very far below the level of the English unemployed. The case of Germany is not quite so bad, but still it is questionable if the most perfect Socialist system could raise its average income to the level of our unemployed.

These careful students also discovered that the highest standard of comfort is found in countries with a very large amount of land per head, like Australia and New Zealand; while the only populous countries with at all a decent standard are the centres of great empires, like Britain and Holland, which draw a vast amount of tribute, under one name or another, from an area many times the size of the mother country.

To try to solve the problems of Europe by merely overthrowing dictatorships and replacing them by democracies only means trying to set Humpty Dumpty on the

wall again. That type of thought is dead, and is known to be dead. Much deeper thinking will be required to solve the problems of Europe.

R. B. KERR.

[We do not see that Democracy is incompatible with anything that Mr. Kerr advocates, assuming for the moment that he has the correct solution for all, or most of our ills. Neither do we see that leaving Hitlerism flourishing will do anything to secure the realization of Mr. Kerr's aims. Personal liberty seems to us a fundamental thing to aim at whatever cures for humanity's ills we believe in. Fascism is a distinct threat to any country that wishes to work out its problems in its own way.—EDITOR.]

SIR RICHARD BURTON

SIR,—You say in the *Freethinker*, that the late Sir Richard Burton was an Atheist, and you are quite right. As a boy of about 12 years of age, I met Sir Richard Burton, who was a friend of my grandfather's. I myself heard him say that, for mankind in the mass, Islam is probably the best religion. Lady Burton was a devout Roman Catholic. I have her *Life of Sir Richard Burton*, it is quite comical how, in it, she imagines that all Agnostics are always "converted" to Papism when they are dying. The Countess Teleki, for instance, the daughter of Lady Langdale.

(Major) HERVEY DE MONTMORENCY.

#### 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

KINGSTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place): 6.0, A Lecture.  
NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30, Mr. L. Tisbury.  
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, Mr. Rowse Jones (National Council for Civil Liberties)—"The Abuse of the Official Secrets Act."

##### COUNTRY

###### INDOOR

BLYTH (The Fountain): 6.0, Monday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.  
CHESTER-LE-STREET (The Bridge): 11.0, Sunday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.  
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Mr. Reginald Bishop.  
NORTH SHIELDS (Harbour View): 6.0, Tuesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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