

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

VOL. LXXI.—No. 2

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 1941

PRICE THREEPENCE

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Views and Opinions

Here and There

THESE are a kind of clearing up notes, and but for the great inconveniences which accompanied the production of the last two issues of this paper, some of them would have appeared last week. The war is taking its course, and the omens are all in the direction of promising us victory over the "enemy." Yet to any but those who allow themselves to indulge in almost criminal wishful-thinking it is clear the end of the war of arms will give way to a war of wits. We have been told—in times of peace—that peace hath its heroes no less than war, although it is not so generally recognized that it is peace that produces the good elements which we praise so highly when manifested on the battlefield. Let us note how highly, and deservedly, we have praised those young air-men who have wrought deeds as full of daring as any that the world has known. And it has also been pointed out that many of these men were up to the time they joined the air-force, working in offices, handing out goods over the counter, were mechanics or tradesmen of one kind or another, at which tasks they might have remained without anyone suspecting that they possessed the one set of qualities which we describe as heroic. And what applies to men applies with equal force to women. With quite unwarranted agreement the majority of men never dreamed of applying to the feminine character, the term "hero" as it is applied to men. And yet women have shown that if fighting—physical fighting—is required, they could hold their own at the side of men in everything save mere physical endurance.

But, and this is the point I wish to make, not for the first time, this heroism of men and women, the devotion to duty, the readiness to risk all in the common good, does not originate in the battlefield, they are expended, sometimes exhausted there, but the qualities that are expended in war and are created in peace. It is from social life that the sense of a common purpose, a common sense of duty, a sense of a common welfare is derived. War does but turn the qualities we properly and honestly praise into another channel.

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The Fight Goes On

One would have to be an incorrigible optimist to assume that because there is a partial cessation of individual and group struggle on the peace level, to exercise them on the level of war, that there will be no resumption of social conflicts when peace comes. War over there will be, as has happened on other occasions after war, a return, or an attempted return to the non-military field of the social antagonisms that existed before war began. Commercial, financial and landed and religious interests will see to this. And in the religious

world plans are being openly made, not merely to profit by the war when the war is over, but also while the war is in being. Last week I called attention to the gross advantage the Churches are taking of the war. Unlike other social groups that have at least called a partial truce of hostilities during the war, the religious forces have become more than ever bound up in sectional and party interests. Whether it be in war or peace religious sects see in social changes and upheavals little more than so many opportunities for sectarian gain or loss. Finding the cry that this war is being waged for the protection of Christianity is wearing thin, a very carefully planned campaign is being carried on to secure a firmer grip on the schools.

For example. The *Church Times* cites approvingly the example of "an experienced priest" who has made great advance in the direction of establishing cordial relations with the local Director of Education, and also with the teachers. The following passage from this communication is worth citing, "We have been careful to show interest in the ordinary activities of the school, and on the look-out to discover new ways in which we can help the teachers. . . the result of this is that we are frequently seen about the school, and both teachers and children have come to feel that Church and school are one unity." This very naive statement is underlined by the editor of the *Church Times*, who supports this very ingenuous priest by saying that in this way "the Church can instil into the school life at least a partial recognition of the vital importance of definite religious instruction." Very, very good—from the point of view of the Church. But it is not altogether wise for the fowler to spread his net within the plain sight of the bird. For, obviously, the Church has nothing to give the schoolmaster in the shape of instruction in the art of education. It is not even pretended that he has. The priest is a trained propagandist, but not a trained teacher, and his interest in the school is that of introducing religion and nothing else. And in this case the priest and the teacher—so far as the teacher assents to, or submits to, the children becoming familiar to the person of the priest in the school, he is helping to break the law, for the Education Act, and Acts, specifically confines religion to the "unsectarian" lessons given at limited times. To permit the whole of the school-time to be permeated with Church influence is to defeat the whole purpose of the Education Acts, and to make the withdrawal of children from religious instruction useless.

Moreover this method introduces another illustration that at bottom there is a fundamental identity of Christianity with Fascism, and particularly with the method that we call "Hitlerism," and the destruction of which is one of the professed objects of the war. Hitler, too, sends his agents with orders to "show interest in the ordinary activities of the people." His agents also aim at "establishing cordial relations" with people who matter, as illustrated by Ribbentrop being made a pet of by English "Society," the praise of Goering by Lord Londonderry and others, with many other cases that might be named. German agents also found it "extraordinary how many chances there are of doing this if one's eyes are kept open," and "how grateful" authorities were for a helping hand from Germany till they found the helping hand had become an iron clasp which bore much resemblance to a handcuff. We have said before that Goebbels and Co. must have studied

closely the history of the Christian Church, and in their worst features they might well declare themselves pupils of Christianity. That they carried these principles further than it usually did is beside the point.

But unless the teachers are helped by the general public, for truth to tell teachers seem to show little inclination to "boot" the priest out of the school, we may find that the activities of the Church during the war will, when the war is over and the social war opens, find the Churches more firmly established in the schools than they have been since the 1870 pre-period. By then the Church will have thrown aside the pretence that their aim is "to help the teachers." They will still be frequently "seen about the school," but it will be in the character of masters, not as mere visitors, and the nation's school will be closed to teachers who are not self-confessed Christians.

Bells

* * *

Let me turn to another matter, which, however, is not so far removed from the one dealt with as it might, at first glance seem. The Archbishop of Canterbury is offended at the action of the Government. He wishes to have the prohibition of the ringing of Church bells withdrawn. The Government declines to do so, and intends (unless and until our artful Archbishop does some backstairs business) to confine the ringing of Church bells to the warning of a German invasion. Of course, the Archbishop, who was called to his post by God (via the Prime Minister of the day), might have guaranteed that angels would warn the Government of the coming invasion, as angels warned shepherds of the birth of Christ, but the bells are there, the unreliability of angelic messages are to-day well known, so that the Archbishop has to be content with solemnly warning Mr. Churchill that the country will be disappointed at the decision.

Now once upon a time an Archbishop threatened with this interference and prohibition of one of the oldest of Christian and pre-Christian customs, would have replied by closing the Churches and forbidding any priest or parson to hold a public service until the ban was lifted. But to-day if the Churches were officially closed it would serve as front page news a day and material for a leading article—if there was no spectacular murder or society scandal on hand, and the mass of the people would not bother further about it. Dr. Stuffem's pills are marvellous cures—so long as one takes them, but if one is prevented getting them for a little while, it is astonishing how well one gets on without them.

I have often said that I find a church very interesting, and parsons also, when they dress to and act the part that is among the most interesting and instructive of our antiquities. And from that point of view I would, if schools were run as they might be run, and staffed as they ought to be staffed, join with the *Church Times* in welcoming the parson in schools, at least two or three times a week. It would make the school, for part of the time as interestingly instructive as a lesson on natural history would be, if the teacher had at his service some living specimens of the animals he is bound to refer to as extinct. And we Freethinkers should never forget how fortunate we are to be living in a time when we can exhibit to those who are interested, what we may call pseudo-extinct specimens of primitive religious humanity.

* * *

Man and His Past

The Archbishop and his bells offer an excellent illustration of what I have in mind. Why do we have Church bells at all? A common reply is, that it is to call men to Church. But that is nonsense. There are numerous meetings, both religious and non-religious, that are held, but which never think of ringing a bell to call probable attenders together. Personally I believe that one reason for Church bells to-day is sheer advertising. The Church bells, "ringing o'er

the sea," and so forth. They unconsciously impress many unthinkable people with the importance of the Church, just as the parsonic dress marks the clergy off as a class that is not to be wholly identified with ordinary folk. To most people there is something singularly attractive in a uniform. But it must be worn by a number. By itself an unusual dress is apt to excite ridicule. If a man walked about the streets with a cocked hat and feathers, he would become an object of mirth. Put the same hats on a column of men, or on a number of men at a royal reception, and the otherwise laughter-provoking hat becomes something in itself; and it conveys power to the wearer. Put the parson in ordinary clothes, let him speak in the ordinary tongue, and his message becomes foolishness and himself as ridiculous as Mosley's stage army without its uniform. So I think that in modern times the Church bell is chiefly valuable as an advertisement.

But most certainly the purpose of a Church bell is not that of calling people to Church. They were not first used for that purpose. The origin of bells, or their equivalents, goes back to the earliest days of religious history, to a time when religion was in the making, a time when a god was made by a man dying a sacramental death, his blood drunk and his flesh eaten as Christians eat the flesh of their God and drink his blood in sacramental wine and wafers. Among primitive peoples bells are rung, tom-toms beaten, rattles "rattled," and all kinds of noises made, for the purpose of guarding men against evil spirits. One use is to frighten evil spirits that would blight the corn, another is to keep spirits at a distance who would give disease to cattle, or to keep at bay spirits who would do other kinds of evils. Almost any up-to-date work on anthropology will give numerous illustrations of this kind. And in the Christian practice of bell-ringing we have a continuation of the same kind of thing. Church-bells were not rung to get someone to church, but for the purpose of keeping someone away. It was to keep Satan from seizing the souls of Christians in a moment of their unawareness that bells were wrung. And that is the greatest insult the Christian Church ever offered to Satan. They pictured him as going to unheard trouble to seize the soul of a Christian saint or layman. Of course they also paid him the compliment of attributing to him the hunger for knowledge, the origin of the passion for liberty, the invention of printing, all improvements in medicine, and above all the patron of freedom of thought. So one must excuse the Church of paying the devil, amongst so many compliments, the one insult of picturing him as spending so much of his interesting and important time in seeking to grab the soul of a Christian monk or devout layman.

But I do find a Christian Church attractive. Not on account of its architecture. That is a subsidiary feature. But because it is actually, and not in a picturesque sense, a museum piece. Most people go to Church and see a man dressed in a black robe reading an impossible story or preaching an improbable doctrine, with the adjuncts of a fine building, and trained choir backed with the singing of the congregation. But when I have gone to Church I have had other visions than these. The walls of the Church have fallen away, and I find myself in some primitive forest clearing. The robes of the preacher fall off and I see him in the paint and feathers of the ancient medicine-man. The music of the organ gives way to the blowing of horns and the beating of tom-toms. I hear the same old extravagant praise of the local mumbo-jumbo, the same expectancy on the faces of the worshippers to give them something, or, at least, not be angry with them. I find the congregation in that primitive clearing prostrating themselves in fact as the later ones do in symbol and in picturesque language. But there is no difference otherwise. There is, in fact, only one religion, but it has many forms; and the pattern of them all is that which was drawn by our most remote ancestors.

CHAPMAN COHEN

Sceptical Schoolmasters

"Who knew the seasons when to take
Occasion by the hand, and make
The bounds of freedom wider."—*Temnyson*

Few schoolmasters have been known to be Freethinkers, for the simple reason that the clerical control of education is so severe that a man so known risked his position. Yet there have been schoolmasters who have proclaimed their rationalism. They have always been exceptional men, and they needed all the courage they had to command. George Long, for example, was for many years a master at Brighton College, and was a most interesting man. His literary reputation rests securely upon his masterly English edition of *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, which is not only an example of brilliant scholarship, but contains, in the preface, a refutation of clerical misrepresentations concerning the great Emperor. Long himself was educated at Cambridge University. A brilliant student, he was bracketed Craven scholar with Macaulay, the historian, and actually gained a fellowship over his very powerful rival. For some years he was a professor at Charlottesville, Virginia, U.S.A., and later professor of Greek at University College, London, where he numbered Robert Browning, the poet, among his pupils. He was also one of the founders of the Royal Geographical Society. His translation of *Marcus Aurelius* is his best-known work, but his *Cicero's Orations*, and *Epictetus* are very fine examples of exact scholarship.

Of more interest to the general reader is Long's last book, *An Old Man's Thoughts*, which is full of interesting things. He said: "I wish Euclid could have secured a perpetual copyright. It might have helped the finances of the Greeks." Elsewhere he has a smart dig at the clergy: "There is no occasion to print any more sermons, when we have done it long ago in a few books." The old scholar had a fierce quarrel with an American publisher, who had issued an edition of his *Marcus Aurelius* without permission. Long wrote caustically:—

"I do not grudge him his profit, if he has made any. There may be many men and women in the United States of America who will be glad to read the thoughts of the Roman Emperor. If the American politicians, as they are called, would read them also, I should be much pleased; but I do not think the Emperor's morality would suit their taste."

The name of William Johnson Cory deserves mention. For some years one of the masters of Eton College, he made a modest reputation with his beautiful verse. Yet the author of that fine book of verse, *Ionica*, deserved a better literary fate than to have two of his best poems quoted in the anthologies. Cory was somewhat eccentric, but he managed to write poetry of real and outstanding value, such as *Heraclitus*:—

"They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear; and bitter
tears to shed;
I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down
the sky."

Cory was very unconventional. Ainger says in his *Memories of Eton*: "If the sound of drums and fifes was heard in the street outside the college he would exclaim, 'Brats, the British Army,' and would actually join a general stampede to see the soldiers go by." Just imagine anyone addressing the curled, perfumed darlings of Eton College as "brats." Cory married rather late in life and had a son whom he named Andrew, "because no monarch or pontiff had borne that name." Truly a striking personality. I have a genuine liking for the old schoolmaster, for did he not write an arresting poem, *Mimnermus at Church*?

Eton College had another schoolmaster well worth remembering, for he was, far and away, more of a

pioneer than any of the others. The life-work of Henry Stephens Salt places him definitely among the potent forces of progress. For he devoted a long life to the service of his fellows, and his significance in modern literature and thought was very marked. Born in India in 1851, he was educated at Eton College, where he later became one of the house-masters, and also at Cambridge University, although he could never have completely acquiesced in the old order of things, such as was dominant at these priest-ridden seats of learning. For the young master was soon reading Shelley's lyrics of liberty, and was absorbing the intellectual audacities of Thoreau and Walt Whitman.

Young Salt soon found out that Eton was a "nursery of Toryism," as he himself wittily described it. There was no bitterness, however, in his criticism. Though he ploughed a lonely furrow, he was never morbid. Indeed, Salt was without fanaticism. Taking things at their true worth, he was never surprised by views he could not accept. He merely acknowledged, with a scholar's urbanity, that they were so entirely different from his own.

Salt was a complete Freethinker. Not only did he conceive society as a great brotherhood, not limited to one race or species, but extended to the whole world of innocent beings. And herein was the genesis of the Humanitarian League, with which his name was inseparably associated for over half a century. The scope of the League's activities may be estimated by recalling that it dealt with such measures as Criminal Law, Prison Reform, Cruel Sports, Humane Diet and Dress, Education of Children, Flogging in the Services, the Humanising of the Poor Law, and many other much-needed reforms. In brief, the distinctive purpose of the Humanitarian League was to consolidate the principle of humaneness, which it considered should be an essential part of any system of society pretending to civilization.

A great reformer, Salt's life was devoted to a ceaseless whirl of activities. Yet he found time for literature. His illuminative and sympathetic studies of Shelley, Richard Jefferies, De Quincey, Thoreau and James Thomson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, proved his devotion to letters. His quiet humour was displayed in a delightful volume of verse, *Consolations of a Faddist*, whilst his scholarship leaps to the eye in his spirited rendering of *The Treasures of Lucretius*, in which the great Roman singer's sonorous verse is rendered into exquisite English. In quite another vein he emulated stout-hearted George Borrow, and his *On Cambrian and Cumbrian Hills* was not without a touch of genius.

The phase of Salt's life-long activities which must appeal most widely to Freethinkers was his championship of the Humanitarian Movement, and of the rights of animals. He will always be remembered as the knight-errant ever seeking out forlorn, oppressed, or distressed causes and objects, in whose behalf to break a lance, and on whom to lavish his passion of pity, and satisfy his yearning for human service. Salt's whole life was a discourse on the indispensability of reformers, who, more even than the poets, are (to use Shelley's words) "the unacknowledged legislators of mankind."

MIMNERMUS

A Survey of Social Science

PROFESSOR E. L. THORNDIKE, the eminent psychologist, covers a very extensive field in his long and elaborate volume, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (Macmillan, 1940). Numerous facts are cited and guiding principles propounded indispensable to all serious students of the complicated phenomena of sociology in its manifold departments.

Dr. Thorndike intensely desires the evolution and establishment of a social order in which the many economic and other ailments that now afflict mankind will be materially removed. If the human race is to survive, the present preparations for warfare, so costly to the community, with their sequel in armed conflict itself, must be abandoned for good and all. Yet, the

most powerful "civilized" States have all deliberately ignored the plain and obvious verity that international differences even when temporarily composed by military or naval success, merely sow the sinister seeds of subsequent wars. Moreover, they also fail to realize that the ordeal of battle is practically certain to prove as disastrous to the victors as to the vanquished.

Thorndike subjects the causation of human behaviour to a careful psychological analysis. Natural abilities, both in origin and application, are tested. Much attention is given to human wants and their legitimate satisfaction, and mental dynamics are also passed under review. But in this portentous volume of nearly one thousand pages, so many themes are discussed—biological, psychological, political, social and economic—that their mere enumeration would become a catalogue.

The Christian religion, it is urged, may afford comfort to dependent minds. At its best, it may have preached the brotherhood of man and helped humanitarian movements, but even then magical incantations survive in its ceremonials. On the other hand, avers Thorndike, "The scientific set of mind is in this last respect in sharp contrast to the Christian, and to other ancient traditions. In philanthropy, as elsewhere, it leaves nothing to magical forces, the action of which by their nature cannot be observed, predicted, and put into harmony with known matters of fact. It also eschews reliance upon any other world than that known to our senses, leaving any other to religion. . . . The scientific set of mind also pays more heed to the consequences of kindly feeling and action and especially to their more remote consequences." The relief of poverty should be superseded by a more equitable distribution of the world's wealth.

We must always face truth, however repugnant it may appear. But the exasperating difficulties in ascertaining truth, Thorndike candidly discloses. He devotes an important chapter to human estimates of values, which are so various and even discordant that generalization becomes hazardous. Still, some values are of universal application. Health is everywhere preferable to disease, and a hearty laugh is of greater utility than wailing or weeping. George Eliot and Madame Curie were of greater value to the community than the average female. Moreover, in any civilized State "honesty is better than thieving; much intelligence is better than little." The desire for nutritious food is far preferable to the craving for opium.

So far as they contribute to human happiness, ethical, esthetic, and also the practical values of everyday life can at present be very imperfectly determined. A completer knowledge and understanding of their social utility is a crying necessity. In creating a science of values, the contributions to thought of the seers and sages of past times are essential, but their prejudices and prepossessions must be discarded. Were such a science created it would necessarily rest absolutely upon clearly demonstrated verities.

Thorndike declares that any really scientific scheme of valuation cannot repose on alleged revelations of a supernatural character, or popular estimation. It also displays "a pronounced antipathy toward marvellous events and mental eccentricities in connexion with the authorship of the doctrine of values. . . . Science expects truths about values to be *worked out* in the same general ways by which the truths of mathematics, physics, geology and anthropology, etc., have been worked out."

Our author's survey of man's present relations to the amenities of life provides little promise of any immediate millenium. But he urges that the possibilities of human control of natural forces might lead to a nearly complete command of man's destiny. And if man fails

to achieve this, it will be due to his own ignorance and folly.

Men's lives are discouragingly brief, and their personal goodness ends with death. But man's genes—his hereditary qualities—may be made persistent by selective breeding, given a favourable environment. Therefore: "One sure service of the able and good is to get and rear offspring." Thorndike deems that penalties for crimes and misdemeanours render small service to the social organism, while rewards for exemplary conduct act as an inspiration in increasing and perpetuating beneficent activities. For the mere repetition of tendencies strengthens them, and when good deeds are performed spontaneously and habitually, both the conduct and characters of men are permanently improved.

Facts must be fearlessly faced. But, sanguine beliefs in the attainment of the highly problematical or practically impossible are more honoured in the breach than the observance. Although men of science differ widely in their social outlook, yet, wherever feasible, any reasonable sociological suggestion for human betterment should be given a trial. After all, the wise and prudent, who at least have studied social phenomena are better qualified for this task than the advocates of wild cat schemes and solutions who are so much at the mercy of their emotions.

Both Governments and the governed must be realists. But unfortunately administrators and public alike "tend to prefer ideas which make them comfortable for the time being over ideas which will adapt them better to reality."

Men of probity and ability should acquire power. When men exercise political, pecuniary or persuasive sovereignty as a result of their sterling qualities, they may accomplish much. This is true enough, but as a practical suggestion, it seems to the writer to be vitiated by the fact that so many honest and capable men are so nauseated by the chicanery widely prevalent in political and social circles, that they refuse all participation in public life. But, it must be conceded that, were such men prepared to help in the purification of party politics, marked improvements might be made. Still, the difficulties of this task, increased as they would be by the sullen antagonism of officialdom, would in all likelihood daunt the bravest and most enterprising apostles of social service.

Wars will continue until their causes are studied and removed. This again, is an onerous undertaking, and the complexities of this problem dizzy and appal. Pressure of population appears to be a fundamental cause of armed conflict. This, it is urged, might be remedied by a substantial increase in staple commodities. If nations maintained peaceful relations, and the birth-rate remained "quantitatively the same as now and qualitatively as good or better, and prudent government, man can increase capital goods almost without limits, and with an actual decrease in the hours of labour and abstinence from consumption."

So long as men of science and letters retain their liberty, they will continue to emancipate the human mind from error and superstition. It is suggested that, given ideal conditions, it might be made possible for interested inquirers to obtain ascertained facts relating to sociology by means of an information bureau, much as the news of the day is now broadcast by the radio or published in the Press.

Machinery should perform all labour entailing degradation or drudgery. Men, it is urged, who are incapable of anything above the most burdensome and brutalizing forms of toil would be better unborn. Nor in a rationally organized community should people labour in occupations below their ability, save by choice in hours of relaxation.

Real equality of opportunity is another requirement. Regardless of wealth or social standing, all genuine merit should be utilized. It should be encouraged and

rewarded, both for personal advantage, and for the benefit of the community as a whole. For, educated and capable craftsmanship once made abundant, universal welfare would be extended. Institutions for the furtherance of improved living conditions deserve the fullest support and these should function for the advantage of all. Every institution which favours the few to the detriment of the many is pernicious in character.

Still, Thorndike contends that there "is no magic virtue in taking power from the strong and giving it to the weak, or taking wealth from the rich and giving it to the poor." Yet, riches and influence should be taken from those who misuse them.

Moreover, quality is far more desirable than numbers, and a further fall in the birth-rate, if accompanied by a relative increase of better stocks, by means of selective breeding, would be beneficial. One half of our planet's present population with qualities equal to its best quarter would prove a much greater asset to our own future generations than those that dwell in the world to-day.

Even if scientific progress and discovery of an unexpected nature may be confidently awaited, still no safe prediction is possible of future developments. Real reforms, Thorndike surmises, are far more likely to result from scientific research and invention than from social reformers, the Churches, or the State.

T. F. PALMER

Our Measure

THERE is only one reliable measure of a person's character and social worth, and that is what he—or she—does. A man may talk from now until the anniversary of Doomsday about the wonderful things he intends to do, and succeed only in proving that there is a vast deal of difference between his promise and his performance. It is not a bad practice to check up on ourselves occasionally, just to see if there are any debts outstanding against us and, if so, how many. We shall probably find if we do this that we have on many occasions spoken unthinkingly, or without giving sufficient thought to the matter in hand, and that we owe a good deal.

Any one of us may swear allegiance to something or someone and discover, later and perhaps with considerable uneasiness of mind, that we cannot go on. For example, we may, with every good intention, join some social or political party and for a time all will be well; the company is quite congenial and we are perfectly happy in our new surroundings, but eventually we find ourselves either in mild or violent disagreement with the policy pursued and we then feel in common honesty bound to withdraw from the organisation. In such a case perhaps the worst that can be said is that there has been a genuine mistake and an attempt made to rectify it.

Again many say, well-meaningly, "Till death do us part!" but in many cases 'twere better that the vow were never taken—as the history of the Divorce Court shows quite plainly. Two people may come together and, in the first flush of enthusiasm, swear undying devotion to each other, only to find that they are—very often through no fault of their own—totally unsuited to each other and that there is no alternative, if they are to enjoy a moment's happiness henceforth, but to go back on their word and separate. Here, again, it is only fair to say that the contract has obviously been entered into without it being understood and appreciated by the contracting parties what marriage involves, and because of this little or no blame can be attributed to either party. They have acted in ignorance of their incompatibility and they must do their best in the circumstances.

But many of us can, without much trouble, recall instances of quite a different kind—instances of where people have made solemn promises to us and not only failed to keep them, but, judging by their attitude when reminded of their pledged word, treated the matter as one of little or no consequence to be dismissed at will. And if we have a little courage and care to go that far, we may recall differences between our own promises and performances. There is no need to particularise. . . .

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that we are, as a body, naturally unstable or dishonest. On the contrary: we may at the outset be quite sincere in our declaration, but something occurs that we never for one moment believed possible, our outlook changes and we regret having given our word. But the truth of the matter is, often enough, either that we speak without thought, more or less automatically that is, or that we do not place sufficient importance upon the words that we use.

It is regrettable, to say the least of it, that so many of us do not look upon a spoken promise as having as much value as a written one, but *morally* one is just as binding upon us as the other—even though one is in concrete form and the other is not. We sometimes say, boastingly, that an Englishman's word is his bond, but, like so many other statements, that is only true at certain times. At other times it is merely an instrument of convenience—or maybe of deceit.

Language has, admittedly, been one of the most powerful influences in the civilising of the human race, but its importance in our everyday lives is so often overlooked. There are, it is true, a good many who are aware of the significance of speech—and there are not a few who employ this acquisition to serve their own selfish ends or the ends of their party—but its value as a social product and its power as a determining force for good or ill is not by any means fully appreciated. Some day perhaps it will be; perhaps some day language will be looked upon as one of the most powerful forces in the world—if wrongly used, as corrosive and destructive as nitric acid, but, if rightly used, as inspiring and elevating as good music. If that time ever comes it will be used—it must be used—with much more care and precision than now.

In the meantime we shall do well to bear in mind that, as with our private affairs, so with our public activities: we are judged—by the thoughtful, at any rate—by what we do and not what we say. Words are as cheap as dirt—and very often just as useless; it is only actions that count in the long run. They are, when all is said and done, the measure of our private or social worth.

G. B. LISSENDEN

Acid Drops

We have had a rather lengthy experience of extravagant statements made by Christians when proclaiming their religion. The *Church Times* must rate low the intelligence of its readers when it lets loose upon them, in its issue for December 27, the statement "The English Church was designed by God to be the salt of English life." We cannot say, of course, that God did not design the English Church, and we know that according to the Bible he did send all sorts of pains and penalties to people who disagreed with him. But to find out that the Church which has always been the stronghold of privilege, and has opposed the Government of the day only when it threatened to be tolerant or progressive, which has its very bishops appointed by political intrigue, and most of its clergy in well-paid posts by favour, the Church which in the earlier days when the labourers of this country were little better than serfs preached its doctrine of contentment in the place in which God had been pleased to place them, to say that God designed this Church specially for England, is to credit the deity with a vindictiveness towards

this country which must be rather trying to the more intelligent class of believers. We have said nothing quite so scathing of the deity as this.

Another gem from the *Church Times* is that the British Commonwealth is "fighting for the principles of the Sermon on the Mount"—such as, we presume, "Blessed are the meek," and "Whosoever smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the left also." The manner in which our airmen, for example, carry out this last rule is very impressive. And as to the Navy, that revels in the task of turning one cheek when the other is smitten. It reminds one of Mark Twain's comment, that when he saw the extent of the British possessions he realized that the British were mentioned in the Bible—"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."

The *Official Year Book* of the Church of England gives some interesting and valuable statistics—though from the Church's standpoint, rather depressing ones. There were, for example, 2832 fewer baptisms in 1939 than in 1938. There were also 26,035 fewer candidates for confirmation, and 4616 fewer Easter Day communicants, and 8,784 fewer Sunday School teachers. The youth and adult religious education classes showed a decrease of over 50,000 attendances, though statistics of other religious and Sunday classes are not available.

Voluntary offerings raised by church collections or parochial organizations seem to have suffered heavily as a decrease of £436,517 is shown in 1939 as compared with 1938. Money for other diocesan purposes showed a loss again of nearly £23,000. Then there is a loss of about £40,000 for home and overseas missions, and contributions for the building, restoration, and furnishing of churches amounted to a decrease of £204,095. 1939 was, of course, not a war year all the time. God knows what the losses and decreases will be during the year 1940.

The *Sunday Express* Staff Astrologer, Mr. R. H. Naylor, has been told by the stars he has consulted that Hitler's "early bitter antagonism to the Roman Catholic Church, has adjusted itself, and will adjust itself still more to show a friendly co-operation with the Vatican." We have an idea that the stars are right this time. Hitler is a Catholic, and though often denounced by his fellow believers in other countries, he has never formally given up his belief. In fact he has consistently declared that God has always been on his side. If he finds now that the Roman Church is better as a friend than an enemy, it is not in the least surprising that he may "adjust" his relations with the Vatican. And it would not be surprising either to find this adjustment hailed with delight by Catholics all over the world, even by Cardinal Hinsley and his flock.

Statistics on religion in "Greater Germany" have been recently published. It appears that the population now numbers 9,600,000 made up by including in Greater Germany the populations of Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Szechoslovakia and Poland. Of these approximately 48,000,000 are Catholics and 45,000,000 are Protestants, the others presumably being either of no religion, or definitely Freethinkers. Excluding Poland there are 54 Bishops, 17,183 parishes and 35,103 priests. In addition there are 678 religious communities of men, with over 17,000 members, while women's religious communities number 7,785 with 101,125 members. Austria also has full quotas—proof positive of the way in which religion has fastened its grip on the people. The query now is—if religion is so strong in Greater Germany, is it not in a great measure respon-

sible for the war? If not, where was its restraining influence? And if it had no restraining influence, why should we have precisely the same brand rammed down our throats here?

Our contemporary, *John Bull*, prints an appropriate "Open Letter" to Lord Daryngton, which we copy without comment—except to say that it's the kind of thing which we have pointed out for years with precious little support from other journals:—

Lord Daryngton, Church Estate Commissioner,

My Lord,—It is a little puzzling that bombed churches are to be rebuilt at public expense. Strange that followers of other denominations should thus have to pay for beliefs they do not share. Strange, too, that the Church should not be expected to sell some of its vast estates to help itself.

But did an Established Church ever pay for anything when it had an opportunity of "passing the buck" on to the public?

There is, by the way, a great deal of impudence when Churchmen speak of Church property. To begin with the Church is a State establishment, and it cannot *honestly* alter its official teaching save by consent of a Parliament that is made up of Christians, Jews, and all kinds of non-Christians, including Atheists, Agnostics and many others of the same kind of brands. As to its property a great deal came, and still comes, from tithes, which were a tax imposed by the State on the people for the benefit of the Church. There were also many Government grants of money and land, running into a total value of many millions, and there is also the annual gift from the State amounting to more millions in the shape of the remittance of rates and taxes. There are lies, damned lies and the statements of ecclesiastics and their friends.

Of all the samples of smug religious conceit commend me to such an article as is written by a Mr. Michael Foot in the *Church of England Newspaper*. In some respects it reminds us of the verbal lashing Ruskin gave a Protestant preacher in a Church somewhere on the continent, and who was cheerfully sending millions of his fellow Christians to hell, but assuring them that they were God's selected. Mr. Foot writes something like Ruskin's preacher. It seems that seven years ago Mr. Foot decided to help God put the world straight. And now he is "Absolutely certain that God has a plan for my life, for our nation and for the world. Secondly that God will reveal that plan to us if we are prepared to listen to Him."

May the Lord gie "us a guid conceit of oursel." Mr. Foot announces to God that he is ready to help him put the world straight. God gladly avails himself of the offer, and ever since God is satisfied with Mr. Foot, and Mr. Foot is satisfied with God. Of course other people are just as certain that they are "right with God." Of course other people are just as certain that they are "right with God," and if what they say is true, as their instructions seem to be different to those received by Mr. Foot, someone is pulling the leg of some one. But, oh the conceit of it! And other men, so far as one can see, quite as admirable as Mr. Foot, are left out in the cold! A *man* faced with an emergency or a problem that requires solution says I will do what I can and hope for the best; the Christian, I am doing what God wants, God and I are working together. So says Mr. M. Foot, so said Torquemada, so says Hitler. We could really do with more men and fewer Christians.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Mr. W. ANGUS says: "It would be a calamity if anything happened to the *Freethinker*, which of all papers I read I like the best."

W. MEALOW expresses the sentiment of most subscribers that the *Freethinker* is more than ever necessary in these days of inanity.

J. GORDON.—We note your desire for some special articles on Materialism, and will remember when the occasion offers itself. But we have dealt with the whole subject in our *Materialism Restated*, and for the moment that must serve.

BAYARD SIMMONS.—Thanks for good wishes, which we heartily reciprocate. We have not heard from our mutual friend for some time.

P. TROWER.—We have received many letters in the same vein as yours, and we quite appreciate the feeling behind them. But we do not regard our contribution to the war damage in the light of a "sacrifice." The need is urgent, and we wished to be in it.

H. WILLIAMS.—Thanks for your propagandist labours. Every new reader secured is likely to be one who will help "spread the light."

J. E. MAGNUS.—From your letter we gather your family associations with so many famous Freethinkers would make interesting reading. Certainly the *Freethinker* will live. It has too many friends to permit its enemies to rejoice at its death.

G. B. LISSENDEN.—Pleased to receive your high opinion of what we have been able to do for the movement.

H. LUCAS.—You are right. A good book is the best of companions in these days. Our best wishes to son John and yourself for 1941.

J. G. LUPTON.—Your experience of the ignorance of the nature of religion manifested by the educated godly is not unusual. Still we have read you letter with much interest.

R. LEWIS.—Thanks for what you are doing. The experience you give may yet bear good fruit.

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.

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.

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.

Sugar Plums

We take this opportunity of thanking all those who have sent us New Year greetings. These have been many and almost uniform in the warmth of expression. If we needed encouragement to go ahead with what has been our life's work we have received it in generous measure. We are prouder than ever of our friends—unsought, but not, we think, undervalued.

The exception to the run of the letters is one from which we take the following: "You are the most amazing puzzle of jargon, intelligence, folly, ignorance and lying that I have ever met." There is a lot more of it, but nothing that comes up to this. It is too good to keep to ourself.

We are still producing the *Freethinker* in difficult conditions. Just as we were beginning to think that we were getting back to normal conditions, the fire raid on London undid much that we had done towards recovery. Fortunately, we have many friends who are ready to lend a hand when we are forced by circumstances to rely upon outside help to get the *Freethinker* into circulation. But in such circumstances delays are bound to occur, and we ask the patience from all who find their paper a little late, or if other things do not receive attention as speedily as usual.

(Continued on page 20)

War Damage Fund

	£	s.	d.
Previously acknowledged	314	3	4
Iconoclast	10	0	0
F. B. Bolton	10	0	0
W. Angus	3	3	0
G. B. Lissenden	5	0	0
J. C. K.	1	1	0
Helen Lucas	1	1	0
W. J. Mealor	5	0	0
C. Caddison	5	0	0
C. C. Dove	1	1	0
F. & Mrs. Aust	1	1	0
Dr. W. A. Brend	1	1	0
F. H. Hornibrook	1	1	0
J. Roberts	2	2	0
G. Cunelli	1	1	0
A. J. Watson	5	0	0
E. Wall	1	1	0
Mrs. and C. McCall	10	0	0
F. Forrest	10	0	0
London School of Economics Rationalist Society	5	0	0
Dr. F. Collie	10	6	0
P. M. Tovey	5	0	0
J. E. Luckens	5	0	0
H. Williams	4	0	0
H. J. Hewer	2	6	0
C. A. M. Sellen	16	0	0
E. C. Hughes	5	0	0
T. Lewis	10	0	0
T. Owen	10	0	0
A. Hook	5	0	0
"To C.C. Man"	3	0	0
Will Mac	1	0	0
G. J. Lupton	10	0	0
W. Richards	5	0	0
H. Youngman (2nd sub.)	10	6	0
E. H. Hassell	1	5	0
Joseph Pearson	5	0	0
W. Kent	5	0	0
J. R. White	2	6	0
Mr. and Mrs. J. Terry	5	0	0
J. G. Burdon	5	0	0
J. Almond	3	0	0
A. Edwards (2nd donation)	5	0	0
F. Newell	5	0	0
D. Penfold	1	0	0
C. Townsend (2nd donation)	3	1	0
Mr. and Mrs. Warner	1	1	0
J. B. Middleton	5	0	0
P. Trower	5	0	0
H. Sykes	1	1	0
J. E. Magness	5	0	0
F. Kenyon	10	0	0
R. Daniell	5	0	0
F. Barwick	10	0	0
A. T. Richell	5	0	0
Mr. and Mrs. C. Potter	5	0	0
V. H. Smith	10	0	0
Jas. Davidson	10	0	0
T. Bayard Simmons	1	1	0
	£376	9	8

We shall be obliged if any who note inaccuracies in the above list, or that any subscriptions have escaped acknowledgment, will be good enough to write without delay. Amendment has been made of amount previously acknowledged last week.

(Continued from page 19)

Congratulations to the military officers in the Braintree district who have told those local bigots in office where to get off. As official permission for those in the trade to show their goods has been refused, a number of officers got together and arranged for the beginning of a series of "shows" on January 5. As they say, "The men have asked for films on Sundays and they are going to get them." We hope the example thus set will be followed in other places. While we are asking for so much from people in the name of freedom, it looks reasonable enough to commence at home by putting an end to a piece of religious tyranny that has simply nothing sensible to support it.

We have said many times, and repeat it now, that subject to authoritative correction, we do not believe there is any legal obstacle in the way of those engaged in the cinema business opening their places on Sunday. The new legislation, dictated as a compromise with bigots, penalizing those who give performances on Sunday, does not, we believe, repeal the method of defeating the old Sunday Acts with regard to entertainments. The only objection to the plan we have in mind is that we have heard from cinema proprietors, who say that if they open in defiance of the bigots, they would be harassed by the police and their ordinary business would be made difficult. To that the answer is that there are still the courts, and the cinema industry is, as a whole, sufficiently wealthy to bring unwarrantable police interference into the high courts. Anyway, we hope the Braintree example will be followed by others.

The method adopted at Braintree, by the way, is to form those who wish for Sunday shows into a club. Each member, a soldier, pays threepence weekly, and this entitles him to bring two visitors. (We hope they will contribute to the finances of the movement). After the films there will be a sing-song and dancing. The proceedings commence at 6.30 and end at 10 o'clock. We wonder what the clergy, and the more bigoted of very Christian superior military officers will say to this. And what will they do? Once again we congratulate the officers concerned on their courage and action.

The West London Branch N.S.S. are holding a meeting to-day (Sunday) at 2.30 p.m. at the house of Miss Woolstone, 57, Warrington Crescent, W.9. Mr. E. C. Saphin will open a discussion on "A Freethinker's Attitude to War." Members and friends invited. Buses 6 and 16 pass the door, and the nearest Tube Station is Warwick Avenue.

We are pleased to say that the packet of letters mentioned in our last issue came safely to hand. But it took six days for registered letters to travel from one end of London to the other. We are sorry to have put readers to extra trouble, but it was unavoidable.

Scrooge Goes to Church

DICKENS' *Christmas Carol* still deservedly retains its place in the affections of the British people. It keeps that place because it is a trumpet call to the secular virtues of kindness and thought for others, and is quite devoid of their too common concomitants of hypocrisy and cant. Scrooge, the hard-hearted old curmudgeon, receives grace not through Christian revelation but through visions of this world as it is, a blend of pathos, misery and bitterness caused through man's thoughtlessness and inhumanity to man. His three enlightening experiences create in him a mind revolution and he emerges therefrom a worthier man, fitted for a life of social utility. It is a homely lesson and, because of this, its place in general esteem is spacious, and bids fair to remain so.

The B.B.C., on Christmas Day, as is their custom, gave a free version of *A Christmas Carol*, in the Children's Hour. From it, it was noticed that Scrooge, after his regeneration, shaved and attired himself in

his "Sunday best" and went to Church. To many, probably most, of the hearers, this was a revelation, and they could hardly be blamed for the reference in *A Christmas Carol* is indeed meagre, as one would have expected.

Dickens makes his character pay special attention to his toilet and dress, obviously as it was Scrooge's intention to visit his nephew in a new spirit of friendliness and partake of his Christmas Dinner. When he reaches the street, an interview with business colleagues is described at some length, in which his changed general attitude creates general surprise. Then, Dickens continues:—

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.

That is the precise emphasis that Dickens gave to the fact of Scrooge going to Church. The emphasis attached by the B.B.C. was altogether different. It was subtle, and misleading. It was but one more instance of how that body consider it their duty on every possible occasion to bring Christianity creditably into the picture, in however discreditable the way.

It was, of course, not surprising that Dickens included the Church in Scrooge's morning walk. Scrooge's spiritual bath had had as its primary result the removing of all sectarianism. It left Scrooge a man and to be human was to Charles Dickens a quality independent of any special creed. What Scrooge had become was

as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough in the whole world. . . . His own heart laughed. . . . it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed that knowledge.

Let us imagine such a Scrooge entering the first Church he came to. Which Church would not matter to him. It did and would still matter much to the Sectarian. Let us suppose the Church he had entered was a fashionable Church. He would have noted in the preacher

The graceful emphasis with which he offers up prayers for the Royal Family, the King and all the nobility. . . . the sleek divine who succeeds him, who murmurs, in a voice kept down by rich feeding, most comfortable doctrine for exactly twelve minutes and then arrives at the anxiously expected "Now to God." *

If Dickens had been alive to-day, how he would have been filled with scorn to learn of the B.B.C. Staff being lined up in the Concert Hall for special instruction in the singing of God Save the King because of a visit to be paid by the late King George V., and the Queen Mother. How, we are told, the staff were instructed to give three cheers, and how to give a roaring fourth cheer so that it would appear spontaneous. This spontaneous part was rehearsed again and again† It is not difficult to guess how Dickens would have reacted to this extraordinary sample of Christian Morality as understood by the B.B.C.

Or Scrooge may have entered a Nonconformist tabernacle and encountered "a coarse hard faced

* Dickens *Sunday Under Three Heads*.

† Lambert *Ariel and all his Quality*.

man of forbidding aspect. . . denouncing sabbath-breakers with the direst vengeance of Heaven." Not a word about Tiny Tim. Dickens was not a man who would have been *persona grata* to the B.B.C. More than sufficient has been said to prove it. He wanted all the influences that uplift and educate the poor to have an extra day each week to do their work in. He objected to the Churches monopolizing Sunday (as they manage to do to an alarming extent on the wireless.) He wanted the parents of Tiny Tim to have museums and art-galleries opened on Sunday, and every opportunity for reasonable recreation and amusement, and he *lashed* unmercifully all those who would have denied them these opportunities.

This is what actually Dickens thought about Christmas can be gathered from the *Christmas Carol* itself.

I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.

Passengers to the Grave! Not a word about the Blood and the Body. And he actually uses that expression detested by good modern Christians—A Good Time.

If Charles Dickens could have applied to the B.B.C. for a job and subjected himself to the questionings of Sir John Reith that was, as to his opinions on Christian Salvation, it is clear enough that he would have been shown the door.

T. H. ELSTOB

Freethought and Illusion

THE connotation of controversial terms like Free-thought, Progress, Reason, calls for attention in their direct personal use, from the danger of their assuming a concrete or absolute meaning in their general employment—taken for granted. Freethought is an expression particularly associated with religious disquisition; but it has implications that ramify into the whole arena of cosmic inquiry, the criteria of knowledge; and touches the passionate conflict of social and material interest—the corpus of human welfare, which links with the notion of "Progress." It implies an especial function—to expose error, illusion, fallacy, prepossession in its every application; and not least to guard its protagonist from harbouring any illusion in the process, from the many pitfalls lying along the path of Truth.

The rationale of inquiry in the sphere of faith and speculation, while removing false ideation surviving from nescience, is search for positive illumination. From one regard herein one might conclude that misbelief was some malign influence from somewhere operating to the detriment of human sanity. One need not labour the point in these pages that such belief springs from false premises and misapprehension. Beyond using his intelligence for the normal purpose of "mind" in organic nature (=self-preservation) our primal thinker, for such he was, set wondering and guessing about his surroundings and phenomenal causation. His basic concept, giving rise to a historic train of superstition, endowed nature, phenomena, with a sentient principle (animism) simi-

lar to that found existing within himself. This fantasy expands into all manner of singular myths, cults, rites, with the development of material culture, quasi-civilization and segregation into groups and kingdoms reflecting alike the character of their creators and physical environment. Hence comes Adoration, Sun-worship, Star-worship, God-worship, Devil-worship, Ancestor-worship, Serpent-worship, Sex-worship, magic, and other horrific notions with related bloody ceremonies; extending from China to Peru.

Among these faiths of a Theistic cast, we get a further expansion into formulated creeds doctrines, cosmogonies, with related "pseudo-philosophies," to expound and justify their content. Here we meet the attribute and place of Reason. There is an assumption on the part of some in this connexion in the quest of rationality, that they command "Reason" on their side in a way their opponents lack. So we get phrases like the "supremacy of reason," or, conversely "the flight from reason" by certain eccentrics who doubt its validity as a factor in truth-seeking. . . . Now reason is simply a common mental quality necessary to every excursion into argumental considerations. In their more complex content it co-ordinates with other attributes, as intuition, imagination, observation, if classed separately for purpose of definition. "The whole man thinks. . . ." It enters into ordinary converse over any point in question: "Give me your reason"; "It stands to reason." And is at one with an exposition of the Differential Calculus, or a discussion by two promoters of a business proposition over a whiskey in a saloon-bar.

The upshot of reason in any particular exercise lies in the quality of the argument involved and soundness of the premiss from which it proceeds. Logic again is simply a mode of consistent reasoning from premiss to conclusion. There is no absolute logic or reason as a supreme criterion; which applies to dialectic in general whatever its subject matter. If the premiss be fake the finest logic must lead to futility. Thus the "Angelic Doctor" is credited with the most authoritative formulation of the canons of Catholic theology. But as these canons fail to equate with the organon of cosmic, natural, and metaphysical verity as demonstrable by knowledge and science to-day—the Thomist philosophy falls inevitably to the limbo of superannuated systems.

Nay, this has significance for free inquiry itself into the ultimate problem of existence, transcending theology or its negation, Theism or Atheism. Though we only allude here to a high abstruse contention in passing, it would appear that in approaching the enigma we reach the limit of human powers—the end of all logomachies. Deep reflection thereon is not new with the keener spirits of East and West alike. And there is one Eastern aphorism to the effect:—

No one yet hath ever unravelled
A knot from the skein of the Universe,
And each who came, and essayed the same,
But made the tangle worse.

Mais revenons a nos moutons.

Following a certain line of causality religion in its Latin derivative (=religio, to bind) has close affiliation with communal order. As out of the primal horde tribal units were differentiated from simple to large and complex unions and kingdoms, the tribal cult is associated with law and regulation. Hence they partake of a sacrosanct character, and once established must not be altered (or amended!) at peril of the common well-being and security. The King or ruler shares in this sanctity. Two instances may be cited from distinct peoples who have influenced the course of Western culture.

In the records of the Jews or Hebrews with their singular ethnical consciousness the Mosaic Law is pre-

sented as coming from Jehovah, who talks face to face with Moses in a cloud before the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The Israelites are enjoined to obey His Statutes under due threats to recusancy. Fierce hostility to the usage and cults of the "heathen" neighbours of "Israel" pervade their pronouncements: said heathen pertaining to the primary civilization of the Near East:—

I am the Lord your God. Ye shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord. If ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments, and do them; then will I give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. . . . But if ye will not harken unto me and will not do all these commandments. And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your souls abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I will set my face against you and ye shall be slain before your enemies they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. . . . And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.

The minute character of these statutes as set forth in the Pentateuch gives the measure of the threat.

Some of the Hellenic peoples are credited with a creative intelligence above the average of their time. They present in their City-States the germ of free institutions in the public assembly or *ecclesia* where *citizens* (a privileged class) foregathered to discuss public affairs. Their achievement in the arts, poetry, drama, sculpture, architecture, is an original contribution to the genesis of Western Culture. In physical speculation and natural science they were, in a measure, pioneers. Yet the last is subject to the caprice, intolerance and superstition of the State cult. In the days of Perikles at Athens, for suggesting that the Sun was not a God but a great mass of fiery substance many times larger than the Peloponessus, Anaxagoras was threatened with death as a "blasphemer." He escaped through the protection of Perikles and left the City. Others met with similar treatment elsewhere at a time when promising guesses at natural truth were forthcoming. Remarks Renan:—

Athens undoubtedly had an Inquisition of her own. The King Archon was the Inquisitor; the Royal Porch, the Holy Office whence issued the accusations of "impiety." Arraignments of this kind were very numerous; it is the kind of case we meet with oftentimes in the Attic orators. Not only philosophical crimes, such as the denial of God or of Providence, but the slightest offences against municipal cults, the preaching of foreign religions, the most puerile infractions of the scrupulous legislation of the Mysteries were punished with death. The Gods whom Aristophanes scoffed at on the stage sometimes slew their scoffers. They killed Socrates, they all but killed Alkibiades; Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Diagoras of Melos, Prodicus of Cios, Stilpo, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Aspasia, Euripides were more or less seriously disquieted. It was the Attali, the Ptolemies who first gave to thinkers the freedom which none of the old republics had accorded to them. The Roman Empire continued the same tradition. (E. Renan, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1880.)

AUSTEN VERNEY

(To be concluded)

Correspondence

PROFESSOR JULIAN HUXLEY AND RELIGION TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I have seen the remarks in last week's *Freethinker* on the interview I gave to Mr. Rowland, and should be glad if you would publish the following comments upon them:—

(1) I do not in the least fight shy of calling myself an Atheist. I had fondly imagined that to say, "I do not believe in God" was the same thing as saying, "I am an Atheist." You, for some reason which I cannot fathom, say that the latter is a conclusion from the former.

(2) You ask "what is a religious spirit apart from belief . . . ?" The answer would appear to be quite simple—a religious spirit. Only someone ignorant of comparative religion or religious psychology would assert that religion was necessarily associated with belief in God. Theism would appear to be a phase of religious development. We know plenty of pre-theistic religions, and some that I may call post-theistic.

(3) You say "the only weapon we have to correct error or establish truth is reason." There I must beg to disagree: It is *reason constantly checked against experience*, unaided, or rather unchecked, reason is more than likely to establish error.

(4) If you do not believe that a religious spirit can exist apart from a belief in God, it is clearly futile my arguing about the destructive and constructive roles of Rationalism.

(5) Your final, personal remarks about myself should be withdrawn.

JULIAN HUXLEY

(1) I am pleased to learn that Professor Huxley considers himself an Atheist. It was what followed his opening statement that led to my misunderstanding. What I said, however, will have served a useful purpose in preventing any further misunderstanding on that matter.

(2) I do not follow Professor Huxley when he says that a religious spirit may exist without belief in God, religious doctrines or a future life. And his repetition is not an explanation. My difficulty is not due, as Professor Huxley suggests, to my ignorance of comparative religion (mythology would have been the more exact phrase) or religious psychology. We may assume a pre-theistic frame of mind out of which the belief in a definite god, or gods, emerge. But how does this help Professor Huxley? Most ideals have a hazy form before they become definite and if Professor Huxley is building upon the theory of "Mana," I cannot see how this helps to justify his use of "religion." And to use the animistic and the pre-animistic as the equivalent of moral rules, or ethical aspirations (if Professor Huxley is so using the term) is quite unjustifiable. Ethics has roots that are not religious. If I may follow Professor Huxley I might say that someone ignorant of the nature and development of ethics could take up that position. In any case, to use a phrase as "a religious spirit," without associating it with real religion, is very misleading and in the case of a confessed Atheist inexcusable, unless he uses it in a spirit that is condemnatory of the influence following the rejection of definite religious ideas. It misleads, and they who use it must be responsible for any misunderstanding that follows.

(3) I do not follow here. I agree that a misinterpreting of experience is checked by further experience, but what is this but checking reasoning by reasoning? I have never believed in the infallibility of reason. I did not say a religious frame of mind could not exist apart from a belief in God. I have all my life been pointing out that this is the case, and that it vitiates our reasoning on other matters.

(4) I agree that until one learns exactly what Professor Huxley means by "religious spirit" it is useless discussing its value to anyone or anything. But the fault lies with Professor Huxley for using a term and refusing to say what is meant by it.

(5) I regret that Professor Huxley should take my summing up of the situation with regard to public men and Atheism, as something that should be withdrawn. I am far from charging him with conscious dissimulation. But a "rationalizing" of one's hopes and fears is very common, there are few with whom, in one form or another, it is absent. It is not many of us who have the mental courage, or knowledge, to lay bare to ourselves the hidden promptings to action. And in the ordinary walks of life, as with those in the public eye, the avowed causes of which we are conscious are only too frequently a mask for the real motivation of speech and conduct.—C.C.

THE OPINIONS OF PROF. JULIAN HUXLEY

SIR,—I appreciate the fact that you find my recent interview with Prof. Julian Huxley (published in the *Literary Guide* for December) of sufficient interest and importance to merit four paragraphs of your always interesting "Sugar Plums"; but I must utter one word of protest.

You suggest that my remark that Prof. Huxley's ideas would be of service for the Rationalist Movement in future was "writ sarcastic." I can assure you that this was not so. Especially in his treatment of the theme of post-war reconstruction I thought that Prof. Huxley was interesting and stimulating.

I would also point out that an interviewer's job is to record the ideas and opinions of the person being interviewed—not to intrude his own personality or prejudices. In the course of the past few months I have interviewed for the *Literary Guide* such diverse personalities as Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, J. B. S. Haldane, Julian Huxley, Marjorie Bowen, F. Tennyson Jesse, Ivor Brown, and Lord Raglan, and among such a mixed group of people there is bound to be considerable divergence of opinion. I think that any advanced movement gains rather than loses by the exchange of views, and I do not feel that we assist the progress of the movement which we support by becoming too rigidly orthodox in our heterodoxy. In any case, as I have said above, my job has been to set down in black and white what the "interviewees" (if there is such a word) have thought about the problems of the times, and I would ask anyone who happens to have read these interviews not to take it that either myself, or for that matter the *Literary Guide* itself, necessarily agrees with all that it said in them.

JOHN ROWLAND

[We gladly accept Mr. Rowland's correction, or rather his explanation. But it struck us as possible that he might have had in mind a warning to "Rationalists" not to be misled by falling for the "religious spirit" as something to be encouraged.—Ed.]

SPIRITUALISM

SIR,—Apparently Mr. Barbanell cannot be persuaded to make anything like a frontal attack on the position laid down in my article on Lodge's sealed message, and prefers to nibble at two small side-issues.

First, re Doyle, I used the words, "This kind of thing," which does not commit me to a *sealed* message in his case. His death was good news-value for Spiritualism, and the public were led to believe that a communication from the "other side" might be expected. I have now to ask whether any eminent inquirers have been converted to Spiritualism as the result of Sir Arthur's activity from the other world.

Have the results (which Mr. Barbanell speaks of) been such as to attract their attention and compel their acceptance?

As for Crookes, I had already quoted my source of information, and, in fact, I will allow my previous letter to answer Mr. Barbanell's of a later date.

G. H. TAYLOR

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

SIR,—I enjoyed Mimmermus's article on the above, but again he is not up to date.

He regrets that Birrell did not write his autobiography. He did. It was published in 1937 under the title *Things Past Redress*. The following are some tit-bits from it.

"'Do try to preserve some order,' said a Judge to a youthful counsel, 'even if it is only an alphabetical one, though experience has shown a chronological order to be the best.'"

"It may be that when I die it will be with a quotation from a poet on my lips. If so, I trust it will not be reported, for ten to one 'Notes and Queries' will discover it was wrong."

"The only thing that is left of the world into which I was born in 1850 is Human Nature."

"I have freely consorted all my life with Catholics, Roman and Anglican, with ardent Evangelical English churchmen, with Nonconformists of every shade, with Modernists, Agnostics, and Atheists, but never have I drawn my breath in so irreligious and ignorant an atmosphere as that of the House of Commons when debating religion. It often shocked me."

W. KENT

Obituary

HARRY BLAKE

HARRY BLAKE, who recently died at the age of 74, in Cape Town, was a staunch Secularist throughout his life, a regular reader of the *Freethinker*, and an ardent supporter of the paper's policy. Born in Chichester, he came to South Africa in the early 'eighties, and for over thirty years was employed as a painter in the Orange Free State, in the service of the South African Railways. During this period he resided at Bloemfontein, retiring on pension in 1926. He had an independent disposition and was, in every sense, scrupulously honest. He never feared death—an inevitable event which, like a good philosopher, he views with equanimity. Shortly before he passed away he expressed the wish that there should be "no religious ceremony of any sort" at his funeral.

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

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury.

INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Ernest Thurtle, M.P.—"Toleration and its Limitations."

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