

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions

### Christian Freedom

THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK has written a series of syndicated articles on "Freedom and Tyranny." A great deal of what he has to say *sounds* good, but if one analyses his statements, paying attention to their significance and their fundamental implications, they are, after all, the expressions of a Christian sectarian and a church official. He desires freedom, but it is a freedom which in operation would be measured and valued by a particular theological scheme. He wishes every one to act up to their "conscience," which turns out to be a conscience that is moulded by his Church, and which will not frustrate its aims. His sentiments *sound* liberal, but they are shorn of much of their value when one notes the number and quality of the qualifications introduced. Dr. Temple is, I should say, by nature a liberal-minded man, but that liberality has been "cribbed, cabined and confined" by his constant desire to maintain the power of his Church and the supremacy of his religion. In such circumstances what is right or wrong is not decided by considerations which rest upon the social and human nature of man, neither are they dealt with wholly on a basis of truth and utility, but obviously the test is whether a teaching or a practice helps or injures his Church, or his religion. In the end the Archbishop lays down principles that must be held to be responsible for some of the greatest offences against the liberty of mankind.

I think I have pointed out before that there is going on in this country a decided retrogression in the form of religion that is being preached. It is expressed in more scholarly language than was used for the same ideas some three generations ago, but the idea is there for those who are able to contrast what was with what is, and to rescue the real idea and the real motive from clouds of words.

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### Back to the Primitive

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the general idea of evolution sweeping all before it. It is true that the majority of the dyed in the wool Christians—lay and cleric—went along the old road proclaiming the old creed, but the better-brained and the more astute felt that some kind of compromise had to be made. Either religion must become synonymous with scientific obscurantism, or a place had somewhere to be found for God. And if it could not be found within the evolutionary orbit why not outside it? So it was suggested that if not within, then a place might be found for God working through evolution. Like a conjuror keeping a ball rotating at the end of a stick, God was the magician who, while out-

side the universe was yet responsible for its complex and interacting movements. Of course, the gross contradictions between such an idea and the practice of prayer and the existence of a huge body of priests, etc., remained, but religion has never seriously suffered from absurdities and contradictions within. It is the pressure of contradictions from without that has been so devastating.

But the priesthood represents one of the oldest of human institutions, the most tenacious in its grip on life, and the most unscrupulous in its manœuvring; with the result there has been a growing attempt to restore God to something like his old position—that of being the necessary centre of all man's hopes and—in a backhanded kind of way—fears. But in spite of religious ideas being dressed up in more philosophical language, in spite of the professions of sympathy with modern ideas, there exists a large body of prominent Christians to-day—both lay and cleric—who see in the present state of the world an opportunity for the reintroduction of ideas which stripped of all disguise would lead us back to the Christianity of at least four centuries ago. The B.B.C. with its command of the public ear employs a number of preachers who preach the one doctrine, "Nothing good without God." Universities preach the same doctrine from professorial chairs, and writers such as Middleton Murry follow the same line. The capture of so many writers—from Protestants—by the Roman Church—must also be noted. And now the world-war appears to be encouraging others in high religious posts to attempt the same end. We are getting back to the primitive in religion.

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### What is Freedom?

As an illustration of this, I have taken an article by Dr. Temple, one of the leading intellects of the present-day Church, on Freedom, as an example of this flirtation with the primitive. Now freedom is a social fact. It has no significance whatever outside a social group. A man on a desert island is not free; there is no one to control him. Freedom is something conferred upon man by society; it gives him the right to act or to speak within certain limits, and in conferring rights it indicates their limitations.

But, says the Archbishop of York, the "authentic formulation" of freedom is, "We must obey God rather than man." And that is either nonsense or it must lead directly to inevitable and immovable confusion. It obviously would not have profited the Archbishop to go back, say, to ancient Greece so he takes as a starting point the statement that "the first claim to liberty successfully asserted against the modern State was the claim to worship God according to conscience." Good pulpit stuff this, but not of much value otherwise. To begin with it was—from the religious point of view—because people could not agree as to what God wished them to do that the row between Protestants and the Catholic Church broke out. And neither side was fighting for any principle of freedom. Each side was, broadly, fighting for the right to coerce by force those with whom it did not agree. "Freedom of conscience" was not freer under Protestants because Protestants were fighting for freedom of expression, but only because once the authority of the Roman Church was successfully challenged, the difficulty of



coercion increased with the multiplication of sects. But where any one Christian Church had enough power, "freedom of conscience" did not exist. It is a sound historical generalization that in the struggle for "freedom" the oppressed is very easily converted into the oppressor, and the conviction of obeying the voice of God rather than the reasoned conclusions of men, inevitably leads to coercion. Obedience to God is most frequently another term for downright tyranny.

This much is admitted by Dr. Temple when he says that "these pioneers had little understanding of what they were doing, and set no store at all by liberty as a principle. But they heard in their conscience what they believed to be the voice of God, and . . . they won the right to freedom of conscience for themselves and for us."

So, after all, these "pioneers" had no thought whatever of fighting for freedom. They had no conception of, and made no stand for the "authentic formula" of freedom. They did not win freedom for us, they merely established their own right (or power) to substitute one form of religious folly for another. Confusion could hardly go further than this exhibition by the Archbishop of York. The "pioneers" won neither freedom for themselves nor for others. What they did win was the power to suppress those who disagreed with them. What happened was that God spoke to the conscience of many people, giving each of them differing messages, and that the very number of the god-originated messages forced the secular State to impose upon these god-guided sects a treaty of peace. Those who believed in God might well thank him for the differences he had created by his unenlightening messages; but what cruelty, what bungling, how much that is good might have been saved if God had been silent. And Dr. Temple might have recalled the fact that the Church of which he is a salaried servant, so long as it could, shut out many hundreds of thousands of people from the rights of citizenship, and branded their children as bastards because God had told dissenters they must not be married by a Church of England clergyman. Conformists and Nonconformists appealed to God, and he replied to each in a different way. It is true that in the quarrels of the sects liberty was furthered, but what a good thing it would have been if none of them had ever existed. In the history of mankind life has become better and thought more liberal as the gods have faded out of the scene.

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#### Freedom and Conscience

"Freedom of conscience—that is the sacred thing," says the Archbishop, "not freedom to do what I choose or to fulfil my own purpose, but freedom to do what I ought and to fulfil God's purpose for me . . . freedom of man in his human right alone, does not deserve to stand. It is a sham and a usurpation." Now if by "human right" we mean what the eighteenth century—or at least a section of it—meant when it stood for the rights of man against the exercise of the authority of Governments and churches, then I agree that such a thing is a pure fiction, as much as the Mr. Doe of a legal argument. But as Mr. Doe does stand for an hypothetical individual on whose behalf certain claims are made, so "human right" is a very useful and terse way of saying that the rights of all men before the law should be equal. It is actually a social right which is legalized as an expression of something that we agree should be given to all. I gather that in this respect Dr. Temple falls back upon the purely and truly Christian position, that as man is naturally a sinful creature there is no basis for good behaviour save the belief in God. It is this position I had in mind when I referred to the retrogression to a more primitive form of religious belief that has set in among Christian leaders. To state the position

plainly is enough to discredit it. It is another aspect of Hitlerism which furnishes one more piece of evidence as to the affinity between totalitarianism and Christianity.

But the equality of all men being granted, why is it a sham and a usurpation? The rights of man are born of his being a member of a group, on the fact that all men are inheritors of the mental and material wealth of that group, and on the fact that what exists in the shape of culture is the common heritage of the group. The "rights" as recognized by law and custom may be only partially recognized, our heritage may be imperfectly distributed, but why, because of these circumstances, do they become null and void, and why is the claim for human rights dismissed as a sham unless we believe in a God and his entourage in the shape of a church and a parsonage?

I do not believe for a moment that Dr. Temple will attempt any answer to these direct questions. It is far safer for him to wrap his cloak around him and steal away to talk to others who are not likely to put awkward questions. But I would put to him a question which I recently put to Professor Wood. Is there any quality exhibited by a believer in God, is there any action, good or bad, with theists that cannot, and is not to be found with those who have reached the position of unmistakable Atheism? I confess I have no great hope of receiving an answer to this. Professor Wood said he could not deal with it during the war-period (although he had time to make the statement that elicited my question), and I have little doubt that Dr. Temple will find himself very busy in other directions.

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#### A Clerical Conscience

Let me return to this "freedom of conscience," on which Dr. Temple dwells so much. It is a phrase very much used in religious propaganda, and ought to mean that in matters of opinion there should be at least equal freedom of expression, with the understanding that with some questions that freedom cannot be absolute. For example, my freedom of expression with regard to the character of my neighbour is limited by whether that expression is likely to injure him or not. The exception would be the plea of *pro bono publico*. Then the larger social factor is brought into operation. In matters of religion there should be complete freedom of expression, with only, at most, the same qualification. Now there are many ways in which this principle is ignored, and I notice that Archbishop Temple does not appear to be interested in these at all. I daresay that if I happened to belong to one of the numerous Christian sects, or even to a non-Christian religious sect, and my freedom of expression met with serious interference Dr. Temple, if asked, might express a probably qualified disapproval. But there are other cases. There is the existence of the Blasphemy laws which are kept in existence for the special purpose of harassing anti-Christians, but which might easily be interpreted to cover questions of morals or various forms of opinion. I do not observe that Dr. Temple is seriously concerned with the removal of these relics of a very low form of religious belief. There are the Sunday laws which forbid the opening of places of amusement that are held to be quite permissible on the other six days of the week. What has Dr. Temple to say about these? There are the laws which by relieving religious bodies from the payment of rates and taxes place a tax upon the whole of the community for the purpose of maintaining places of religious worship. One would like to have the Archbishop's opinion on the justice of this. There is the presence in one of the Houses of Parliament of a number of bishops, whose vote and voice will always be raised against any legislation which threatens the power or position of their Church.



There is the coronation oath which forces the King to avow his belief in a special form of religious belief—whether he believes in it or not. There is the payment of tithes for the upkeep of Churches, which must be paid by all directly or indirectly. There are other things that might be mentioned, but all of these are clearly cases that involve freedom of conscience. For one who says that the society which exists after the war must wipe out many of the privileges that existed in the pre-war State our Archbishop is remarkably reticent.

So it would seem that when the Archbishop talks of the sanctity of conscience he really means the sanctity of the religious conscience. And when he says it is our duty to obey the voice of God, it is his God that he has in mind; or if he says that some men are apt to take anything as being the voice of God, and that in such cases one must make sure that it is the voice of God, the reply is that in that case the ultimate guide is not the voice of God, but the method we have of determining whether what we take for the voice of God is an illusion or not.

Now I do not think I can be rightly charged with being egotistical if I say that I am as worth while being spoken to by God as either of our two Archbishops. They both believe that he has spoken to them—through their conscience—but until God speaks to me I am unable to decide whether they are or are not labouring under a delusion. At any rate God has not spoken to me, and, candidly, I believe that I am as worth while being spoken to as any parson in the country. And just one final question. Is Dr. Temple mistaken when he thinks God has spoken to him and ignored me, or am I right in thinking that Dr. Temple is labouring under a very common form of religious delusion?

CHAPMAN COHEN

## A Half-forgotten Humorist

Laughter is the property of man.—Rabelais.

A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.

Shakespeare

AMBROSE BIERCE, author, humorist, soldier, is far better known in the United States of America than in England, although our own Fleet Street knew him for some years. Across the Atlantic his works have been collected in a handsome edition in a dozen volumes, and the reading public never seems to tire of his short stories. In this country, however, he is represented by stray books which are the joy of discriminating lovers of literature, and by his spicy contributions to the old *London Figaro*, which kept the Metropolis laughing in the 'seventies of the last century.

His career is in many respects remarkable, even romantic. When over seventy years of age, when most men think of slippers and ease, the old warrior left San Francisco to fight with General Villa's army in Mexico. A generation earlier he had fought under General Grant in the American Civil War in the Federal Army, rising from a private soldier to the rank of major. At the close of the Civil War, he wondered whether to devote his life to military or to literary pursuits. He decided to become an author, and made a reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. As a story-teller he rivals Poe, Kipling and De Maupassant. For mordant humour he has been credited by many good critics with being the finest satirist since Jonathan Swift.

Why Ambrose Bierce's humorous works were not as popular as those by Artemus Ward, Mark Twain, and Jerome K. Jerome, is a mystery. That he is as funny as either is evident. If his humour was not

appreciated by the reading public to the same extent as those others, it may be because he chose to expend it largely upon a disrespectful perversion of religiosity. The proper study of mankind is man, and possibly the only burlesque that causes the wide mouth of the general reading public to broaden to an appreciative grin must also concern nature as they know it, and not the alleged supernatural. Bierce deserved a place beside the other humorists mainly because his work is of a far rarer quality than theirs. Two of his books with the quaint titles, *The Fiend's Delight*, and *Cobwebs from an Empty Skull*, revealed a mordant satire that is absolutely unique, and they were as full of provocative profanity as an egg is full of meat. The title-page of *The Fiend's Delight* was arresting. It was ornamented with a vignette drawing showing a very sooty devil toasting a fat baby at a large fire, whilst the accompanying letterpress reminded the reader that every day one should do a worthy action. An entirely different facet of Bierce's undoubted genius was revealed in his book, *In the Midst of Life*, a series of powerful short stories largely concerned with military episodes in the American Civil War, which for bare artistry outdistanced all his rivals.

Discussing his works, no less a critic than Gertrude Atherton said that Bierce had the most realistic imagination of any of his contemporaries. This rare quality positively overflows in his humour. Here are a few examples taken at random from his numerous writings:—

I once knew a man who made me a map of the opposite hemisphere of the moon. He was crazy. I knew another who taught me what country lay upon the other side of the grave. He was a most acute thinker, as he had every need to be.

If a jackass were to describe the deity, he would represent him with long ears and a tail. Man's ideal is the higher and truer; he pictures him as somewhat resembling a man.

In calling a man a hog, it is the man who gets angry, but it is the hog who is insulted; men are always taking up the quarrels of others.

Camels and Christians receive their burdens kneeling.

It is wicked to cheat on Sundays. The law recognizes this great truth, and shuts up the shops.

Most people have no more definite idea of liberty than that it consists in being compelled by law to do as they like.

To pick out passages haphazard is not doing real justice to an uncommonly brilliant and witty writer. Not only does a jest's prosperity lie in the ear of him who hears it, but it has its life in an atmosphere of its own, and there are few plants so tender in the transplanting. While so many skimble-skamble humorists were made much of, one cannot help regretting the inadequate appreciation that Bierce won on this side of the Atlantic. Of course, discriminating readers know of his writings, but that the wider public should not have had an opportunity of testing what he wrote is unsatisfactory.

The function of a humorist is far too often discounted. Even the clown who grins at you through a horse-collar, and sets you laughing back at him does you a real service. The physiological and psychological value of laughter has never been appraised at its true value. Although medical men bestow a certain patronage on cheerfulness, and give it a minor place in the pharmacopœia, no one will dispute that the humorists are the benefactors of society. The incomparable Rabelais, himself a great humorist, declared that laughter was the peculiar property of man. We tend to lose sight of his wholesome truth, and we are, in this respect, less wise than our fore-



fathers, who could even jest about death. The man that has no music in his mind is a discontented and disgruntled man. Just as certainly the man who laughs apologetically is only half a human being. It is only by gay hearts that the best work of the world is done.

MIMNERMUS

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## "New Writing"

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IN a recent article (published in the *Freethinker*, December 29, 1940), I recommended the first volume of the *Penguin New Writing* as one of the most stimulating of recent collections of prose work. The authors contributing to it, I went on to explain, had adopted what was virtually a new attitude towards the realities of art and life, and had provided their contemporaries with a realistic and exciting picture of this twentieth century. Some readers of that article, however, may have realized that I found it somewhat difficult to explain precisely what these "new writers" were endeavouring to do, since an exact definition, in the sphere of the arts, is one of the most troublesome and elusive things imaginable.

Now, however, swiftly on the heels of the *Penguin New Writing*, there comes a sixpenny "Pelican Book," which does the defining of the spheres and methods of the "new writers" far better than I could hope to do. It is called *New Writing In Europe*, is written by John Lehmann, and discusses the work of such representative writers as W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender in verse, and Christopher Isherwood and Rex Warner in prose. There must be hundreds of writers whose work is briefly examined and evaluated in the pages of this sixpenny book, including several whose writing will already be familiar to readers of this journal. Jack Lindsay receives some attention, for example, as does Lewis Grassie Gibbon, that young Scot whose premature death was a serious loss to the literature of his country. T. S. Eliot is discussed at some length, though his influence in the matter of "new writing" is more as a result of his brilliantly developed technique than as a result of the ideas which he has put forward.\*

But what, it may be asked, do the majority of these writers stand for? After all, they include novelists and poets, playwrights and journalists. They are mostly young men, though some of the older figures, such as E. M. Forster and Aldous Huxley, may qualify for inclusion in their ranks. Well, as I see it (and, incidentally, as John Lehmann sees it also), they have realized, to a degree unrealized by most of their contemporaries, the dangers inherent in the rapidly-accelerating decay of that Christian-capitalist civilization which is the culture of the majority of the countries in our world. In other words, the rapid disappearance both of capitalist economics and of Christian theology (it is merely a matter of time before they both make ignominious exits from the scene) has brought about a first-class crisis in which this war is merely an incident. The growth of Fascism and Nazism is really the important symptom, and in the struggle against these forms of tyranny the artist (and more especially the artist of words), has a great part to play. Yet he must not be a mere propagandist; he is also, as Isherwood has so plainly stated, a recorder of the tendencies of the times.

\* While writing of T. S. Eliot, I may perhaps be permitted to quote from a letter which I recently received from him, as a result of my article, "The Evolution of Mr. Eliot," published in the *Freethinker*, November 24, 1940. In the course of this letter he says: "You speak of 'young followers' who have managed to secure 'a far greater measure of publicity and commercial success' than I. This suggestion of base motives in the author, and meretriciousness in their work, I should like to protest against." I gladly withdraw any such suggestion.

In the past few years prior to the outbreak of war in September, 1939, many writers saw this more and more clearly, and said so in no uncertain tone; but the weakness of their position (the only real weakness, as John Lehmann admits, in the whole attitude expressed by *New Writing*) was the way in which Auden and other much-published writers failed to face up to the war. For years previous to the war's beginning these people had stood firmly against Fascism, several of them even going so far as to fight in the Spanish War. Some of them were killed in that preliminary skirmish for the battle in which Great Britain is now engaged. It is therefore pertinent to ask what they have to say of the present position. They aver that the arts have an important rôle in social life, and that rôle remains, whether the world is at war or whether a nominal peace reigns all over the world.

*New Writing*, in the persons of its most prominent advocates, has tended to shirk that issue; but it is an issue which will have to be faced sooner or later. In the meantime we can all admit that the people who contribute to this new movement in literature are providing a genuine intellectual stimulus, which is always valuable. I am sure that all real Freethinkers with an interest in cultural developments will welcome John Lehmann's treatment of the movement as the first authoritative statement yet made by a critic who has seen its growth from the inside.

S.H.

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## New Testament Problems

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### III.

CHRISTMAS and the New Year gave our professional theologians a magnificent chance of selling their wares, and backed up by the B.B.C., they left nothing to chance and gave us as much of the primitive kind of religion as they could turn out working at full pressure. Most of it dealt with the old story of the marvellous Babe told with the same disregard of evidence or truth which has always characterized the Christian yarn; and, as I have pointed out so often, one would never suspect from the pontifical utterances of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York upon it, or even the less restrained balderdash of a convert like Fr. Ronald Knox, that there was any problem whatever in the New Testament stories—or if there were problems, they had all been solved as easily as a schoolboy can do simple addition.

I have already given a few of the ridiculous contradictions in the Gospels, most of which should have shattered the myth of "Inspiration" or "Infallibility," but unfortunately few Christians are allowed even to suspect that there are any difficulties let alone read such a heretical and iconoclastic journal as this one. They just swallow and accept nearly everything told them, when even a little enquiry on their part would have shown that Christian scholars can be almost as heretical on some points as a Freethinker. Yet even these do not question some of the stories which are considered as beyond any criticism.

Take, as an instance of this, the problem of the Twelve Apostles. I do not remember seeing in any of the many theological works dealing with apologetics that I have read, any suggestion that the Apostles never lived at all. And even the Freethinkers who have discussed the question and admit this contention seem to be very few indeed. Dupuis, Volney, Robert Taylor, and John M. Robertson were all convinced that the Apostles were myths, but how many more? Yet there is nothing outside the New Testament which mentions them except some late legends for which no evidence or authority can be produced. The problem is not whether there were



some people who went about trying to make Christian converts once the nucleus of Christianity had been fashioned. The whole point is, what evidence can be produced to show that Peter, John, and all the others including Judas Iscariot, really lived as described in the New Testament? I assert that it cannot be produced, and that we are facing here the same kind of myth which we see in Jesus and his Virgin mother.

So hopelessly confused are the Synoptic Gospels in many particulars, that even on this problem of the Apostles, their names are uncertain. Matthew calls an Apostle, Lebbeus Thaddeus, Mark calls him Thaddeus only, while Luke says his name is Judas. Of course he might have had all three names, which is one explanation given by apologists. But why this uncertainty if they had been known so well? And the curious thing about John is that he does not give their names at all—a problem about which apologists are in despair.

Voltaire, who believed in the existence of Jesus, naturally assumed that the Apostles all lived; but he called them a "A dozen knaves as ignorant as owls." Farrar, in his *Life of Christ*, admitted also that they were "unlearned and ignorant." But unlearned or not, if they had really gone through the trials and tribulations given in Christian history they would surely have made some impression on their pagan contemporaries. Yet, as far as I know, there is not a single Roman or Greek historian who mentions them. Why?

The erudite Dr. William Smith, in his *Smaller Bible Dictionary*, points out that there are three periods in their history—the first in Jerusalem with Peter as the head, the second as Antioch with Paul in command, and "the third apostolic period is marked by the almost entire disappearance of the Twelve from the sacred narrative." And Dr. Smith adds, "Of their missionary work we know absolutely nothing from the sacred narrative." Twelve Apostles, all of them filled with the Holy Ghost, with one object only in view—to spread the Word of God through Christ Jesus, and contemporary history is absolutely silent about them! It is incredible.

Of course, the Church soon made up for this. Apart from various Gospels and Epistles claimed to be written by the "unlearned" and "ignorant" Apostles, most of which were, possibly with reluctance, consigned to the New Testament Apocrypha, but which are in reality just as "canonical" as those in the "sacred narrative," we have full information as to where each went to preach, and what was their ultimate fate. Of course, they suffered most unpleasantly, the Church historians vying with each other in describing their terrible trials and mode of death, all carefully designed to show how a martyr's crown was the necessary award to those who so faithfully preached the Gospel. All these narratives are as incredible as those in the *Arabian Nights*, and quite as silly, if not sillier. It is doubtful if our modern orthodox historians believe a single item in the list of "martyrdoms." The truth is that the Twelve Apostles disappear from the "sacred narrative" without a trace—just as does the Virgin Mary. Nobody knows what became of any of them; and the only reasonable deduction is that, just like Jesus himself, they all are just myths.

It is impossible here to deal with each Apostle in turn, and show how the stories concerning them are either without any evidence, or that they contradict each other, or are utterly absurd. I think it ought to be pointed out that the most famous story of all, that of Judas Iscariot, is quite without any foundation. It is so obviously mythical that I have never understood how any Freethinker could read it without a guffaw. Apart from the fact that there was nothing for Judas to betray, on the Gospels' own showing—for Jesus was

particularly well known—it surely is obvious that it was invented to cast still more opprobrium on the Jewish race for having the impudence to reject the Christian religion. Even at this day it is used by very pious Christians for the same purpose, though they will blather about "loving your enemies" without ceasing at the same time.

But the whole story of the Apostles, whether in the Bible or in subsequent legends, is a problem still to be solved by theologians. We Freethinkers have already done so.

H. CUTNER

## Acid Drops

"A wonderful gesture of good will and charity." "A Miraculous achievement." "A manifestation of charity and courage." "A great historic pronouncement." These outbursts of surprise are taken from the *Church Times* of January 10. What is it all about? It is concerned with an appeal to the English people signed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Hinsley, representing the Roman Catholic Church, and the Free Church Moderator, representing the Nonconformists. The *Church Times* clinches the matter by saying that "Never before have the three great groups of English Christians made a united appeal to their fellow countrymen." Wonderful! After all these centuries, and in the face of the silly gush and the professional twaddle concerning the supreme value of Christianity for inducing men to love one another, it is seriously cited as something bordering on the miraculous for these groups of Christians to fix their official signatures on the same document. There is nothing in the world quite like Christianity in practice. That is the one piece of brightness in a grey outlook.

Vice-Admiral Drury Low, who is in favour of giving the men in the Navy a good dose of religion, probably whether they want it or not, writes in the *Daily Telegraph* congratulating the B.B.C. on "inclusion of one minute silence at 8.59 p.m." We can suggest many other times during the day when a period of silence would reflect greater credit upon the B.B.C. than which does take place. There is the seven-fifty-five horror, the times when listeners are subjected to the inane utterances of ill-educated parsons, the offensive grovelling before the British Mumbo-Jumbo, in order to show what poor objects we are without God. There really are times when silence is golden.

The editor of the *Church Times* reminds his readers that Hitler's triumphs would have been impossible without the direct and indirect support of Stalin. We think it only fair to add that a very powerful factor in building up the strength of Hitler, was that Hitler and Stalin were at daggers drawn. The Nazis would never have been where they are, and it is probable that Stalin would never have been in friendly touch with Hitler, but for the highly-placed Christians in this country, many holding high Government positions, who deliberately played into the hands of Hitler because they regarded him as a fine defence against the spread of Russian Atheism in Europe, and particularly in this country. Some of those who are now writing in the press, and some who are still holding office, are among those who raised the cry of better an alliance with Hitler than with an Atheistic State. Nor ought we to forget that our policy with regard to Spain was, with this class, affected by those whose first idea was to prevent friendly intercourse with professed Atheists. The man who undervalues the power of Christian bigotry for evil in this country has much to learn and much to account for.

For the first time—so far as we know—our Prime Minister has given utterance to the lying cant of the Churches that this war is for the defence of Christianity. In a recent speech he is reported as saying that we are fighting to establish a civilization based upon "Christian ethics." Can we imagine Winston Churchill turning one cheek



when the other is smitten, or giving Germany some of Europe because it has already "pinched" a lot of it? Or does he really believe that our wide-flung "possessions" are ours in realization of "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Really Mr. Churchill should remember that it is a poor return for the help he has received from millions of people in all parts of the British Empire to tell them that they are fighting to establish *Christian* ethics. There is, or should be, no need for his dancing in this manner to the tune that is played by the Churches.

The Dean of St. Paul's seems quite convinced that the preservation of his cathedral from the recent disastrous fire-raid, while "great fires" were caused all round the area in which the church is situated was God's work. Dean Matthews is perhaps a better authority on what is God's work than we are. But is it not regrettable that God could not stretch his protecting arms, or legs, or whatever he works with so as to cover the streets round St. Paul's? We know that some of the buildings that were destroyed were erected by many "godly men," and even the plates of the Bible were not protected. In all humility we suggest that God manages these things very badly. What a chance there was, and what a fine advertisement it would have been, if while the rest of the stock of books was burned the plates of the Bible had remained unsinged? The way he manages things encourages the ungodly to smile and the wicked to jeer. Even Dean Matthews would have shown more intelligence if he had laid low and "said nuffin."

We wonder whether anyone has noticed something remarkable "in the air" during the last week or so. They should have done so, for we have had, not a day of national prayer, but a week of world prayer, organized by Christians and carried out by Christians. What has happened? Has God been induced to do something by this verbal bombardment from the four corners of the earth? We are expecting to be told that the victories in Africa, the improved outlook of this country, the whole-hearted support that is to be given to the Allies by the U.S.A., all these are so many answers of God to the week of universal prayer. We do not say that this does not explain the situation. Only that God is not a good "timer. For the results that occurred during the week of prayer were well on their way *before* the week of universal prayer. God appears once more to have "missed the bus."

By the way, we record one more miracle that has happened at Lourdes. A nun with tuberculosis of the bones of her left leg (of course incurable, the miracle would have been useless otherwise), has been cured after a single visit to the shrine. But the nun had just as much faith in the shrine before she visited it, as she had afterwards. Why on earth didn't the saint prevent the nun ever developing tuberculosis? It is the damned silliness of the thing that impresses one. Prevention is much better than cure at any time.

Meanwhile there are in the British forces a large number of Roman Catholics. Many of these will have been wounded or will be wounded. Fitting up a hospital is a costly business, and curing a very slow and tedious one. Now if all believing Catholics were sent to such a hospital as the one suggested, controlled by priests and nuns, drenched with holy water, stocked with relics of the saints and covered with their effigies, and each wounded man with a letter from the Pope under his pillow, we should be able to test the value of Roman Catholic religion as against the non-godly practice of the ordinary medical practitioner. And although doctors belong to a very strict trades-union, they could not prevent this experiment being tried.

With all the solemnity that accompanies established humbuggery, a Conference of "bishops, clergy and laity" considered at Malvern, the other day, "how Christian thought can be shaped to play a leading part in post-war construction." Now it would be passable if the post-war era were considering whether the *thought of Christians* could be of help, for, obviously, Christians and Jews and Mohammedans, with the members of all the other creeds,

have a great many ideas about things in general that have no more connexion with their ideas on many of the most important things in life than the moon has with the market price of cream cheese. But somehow the humbug of religion being necessary must be kept up. So the thoughts of Christians become Christian thought, and the foolish, if they meet with an idea with which they agree, put it down to the credit of Christianity. They might as well attribute the colour of the hair of a red-headed parson to his belief in the immaculate conception.

Notice that the aim of this body of bishops and clergy and laymen (not that they are very influential there, we suspect) was to see in what way the Churches could play a *leading* part. Not merely a part; that would not advertise the Church. It must be a leading part; the people must follow where the Churches lead, and that means more fooling. The Church must be on top, or it will resist any reform that comes along. The resolution that was passed also declared that "The Church could never commit itself to any proposed change in the structure of society as being a self-sufficient means of salvation." That makes the position quite clear. It underlines what we have already said. No scheme of social regeneration will be considered unless it gives the church a leading place. If the Russian revolutionists had brought about their revolution in the name of religion, it would have been far more favourably received in this country than it was, and its aims would have been more impartially considered. But it refused to give the Churches a front place; it declined to say that man had to rely upon God. It left the Churches out, and the Churches never forget and never forgive things of that kind.

Lord Hugh Cecil says that "the schools in which religion is taught are the citadels of Christianity." Lord Hugh Cecil does not say exactly what he apparently means. Clearly he does not mean that a school in which religion is taught is a bulwark of Christianity. It might be a religion strongly opposed to Christianity. What he means is schools in which that form of the Christian religion is taught which he believes to be the bulwarks of Christianity. So far we agree with his statement. But other Christians will not, and we are faced with the old quarrel between Christians as to which party shall have its religion branded on children just as though they were so many cattle carrying the brand of their owners. The one completely appropriate figure applied to Christians in the New Testament is "Ye are my sheep." No other animal would serve quite so well to represent the true Christian—so far as his religion is concerned.

But religion is, nowadays, with all enlightened people, a matter of opinion. We expect that Lord Hugh Cecil, while he has no doubt himself about the truth of the form of religion he believes, would admit that he may be mistaken. He would admit there is no absolute proof of its truth. Putting aside the disbeliever in all religions there are hundreds of millions with all sorts of religious beliefs differing from those held by Lord Hugh Cecil. That, as we have said, obviously reduces Christianity to a form of opinion. And in this situation there is the obvious duty of parent to child to consider, whether he is justified in placing before children as something that must not be questioned a number of doctrines which are no more than unverified speculations, and which large numbers reject as they grow older, and in order to do so unlearn what their parents have forced upon them by taking advantage of their lack of power to resist. We suggest to Lord Hugh and his kind that parents have responsibilities to their children, and that one of these consists in training them so that they may be able to distinguish between verifiable facts and mere speculations.

The *Catholic Herald* has a special column in which it undertakes to deal with the difficulties Catholics experience in relation to their creed. One innocent writes to the editor enquiring whether it is true that "the Catholic Church does not encourage education for fear of losing control over the people." To which the editor replies that this is the silliest charge he has come across, and refers to the number of Roman Catholic schools in this country, and also states that "the Church preserved learning during the 'Dark Ages,'" etc.



## TO CORRESPONDENTS

THE General Secretary of the N.S.S. acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society, C. Townsend, 3s. 4d.; C. Rudd, £1 1s.; A.W., 10s.

FREETHINKER Endowment Fund.—Mrs. A. Webb, 10s.

To Circulating and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—Mrs. A. Webb, 5s.

E. SMEDLEY.—Have read your letter with interest. It is a hard struggle, and we are kept at full stretch all the time. There is not merely the constant anxiety over things, but to overcome them successfully runs up expenses to a considerable amount. Still, we keep on, and that is the main thing.

J. PEARSON.—The policy of the Roman Catholic Church always represents a danger to the existence of genuine freedom. Will bear suggestion in mind, but for the moment we have our hands very full.

M. RAY.—Obliged for sentiment. We are quite well, although living in a great rush.

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.

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.

## Sugar Plums

May we again remind readers that the Pioneer Press, the National Secular Societies, and the Secular Society Limited are willing to send literature, including weekly copies of the *Freethinker* to members of the forces free. In doing this we rely upon the application being made, at least in the first instance, from those who are already readers of this paper. Promiscuous distribution is not so effective.

We are constantly warning Freethinkers to be on their guard against the plotting of religious bodies. War or no war they pursue the one end of seeking sectarian aggrandisement at the expense of the community. All sorts of organizations are being formed, under all kinds of specious names, but the aim is the same with them all—the determination to profiteer out of the war. The latest attempt at this kind of thing reaches us in the form of a circular from the "Parents' Association." This Society is "patronized" by a number of more or less "distinguished" personages, the membership fee is ten shillings per year; the price of the six-page pamphlet is threepence, plus postage. The society is evidently not hankering after the "common people."

There are quite a number of amiable commonplaces in the document, but we fancy the real aim is expressed in the paragraph, which asserts that a desirable social State is not possible "without regular prayer, or without regular corporate prayer in Church or Chapel, because experience has shown that corporate as well as private prayer is necessary for man's spiritual development. Family prayer, with both parents and children together, should be treated as a matter of routine, like family meals, from early childhood." Among those who endorse this rubbish is Sir Chalmers Mitchell, Professor Ernest Barker, Professor Carr-Saunders and Sir William Rothenstein.

We expected better of at least three of the names we have just mentioned. And when we find them declaring in set language "Recent history has made it clear that the Christian tradition is the rock on which European civilization is built, and that departure from it inevitably means a return towards barbarism," we are left dubious as to whether these men are being fooled by the "Parents' Association," or whether they are fooling the Association.

(Continued on page 32)

## War Damage Fund

OUR War Damage Fund is progressing well, and bearing in mind the many calls there is upon all to-day, and also the fact that the loss by deaths experienced, and the misfortunes in business circles and through enemy assaults, the response to date is something on which we may well congratulate all concerned or interested. But, after all, the *Freethinker* is the *Freethinker*, and I know of no other journal in this country with which there exists so fine a sense of personal association and even affection. We can give but a few quotations from the letters received. And in this connexion we must acknowledge, generally the many letters we have received from those who have by war conditions been prevented helping as they would wish. We can assure them that we value their good will and interest in what we are doing very highly indeed.

Mr. P. Foster writes: "I think it necessary, and the proper thing to do, for all those who have been fortunate enough to escape "Jerry's bombs," to contribute to the best of their ability. Kindly accept my fullest sympathy in your troubles in this present time." Mr. A. George, in the course of a very heartening letter, says: I feel I should starve without the *Freethinker*." We can assure all concerned that whatever may happen that form of starvation is not likely to be inflicted upon anyone.

Mr. Ralph Brown pays us the compliment of the following, with cheque for £10: "If I could make my donation the measure of my esteem for you it would probably be nearer ten thousand. Even then it would not represent all I owe you for the part you have played in my mental emancipation." Mr. H. V. Templeman hopes that adequate support will be forthcoming. "It is the least those of us who do not take an active part in the movement can do." Mr. W. T. Nelson: "May you and your staff retain good health and vigour and clarity of thought in this muddled world."

In thanking us for what this journal has done for the "Cause," Mr. T. Robson asks to be "associated with those in word and phrase of greater depth of kindly feeling than my poor efforts could hope to excel." The greatest of us can only do our best. T. Lewis, enclosing his mite, laments that: "Little more than a year I could and would have sent ten times as much. But hard hit as I have been by the war, I cannot rest with my name absent from your list." We regret the cause of the lamentation, but we cheerfully take everything for granted, and count it not the less worthy than if the wish to send the larger sum had been gratified.

Mr. C. Rudd, a reader of this paper for forty-five years, and whose name must be familiar to many readers, writes: "The donation is only a slight expression of my gratitude to you for the admirable way in which you have edited and carried on the dear old paper, for many years. I hope you will be spared many more to continue."

We must rest here for the time being.

The following list of acknowledgments to this Fund carries us until January 13. We hoped to have been able to give a closing date for this, but hope to do so soon. The subscriptions have been generous, but the need is pressing. Every extra month of the war sees an increase in costs, and the necessity for taking precautions, so far as is possible, to ensure the regular appearance of the paper, involves an extra and a continuous expenditure. We are passing through an anxious and an arduous time, of which the financial part gives us the least concern. We leave that aspect to those who know the *Freethinker* and its importance to the Freethought movement in this country with the utmost confidence.



Previously received, £376 4s. 3d.; H. Ormerod (2nd sub.) £10; J. McCartney, £1; H. Beck, 5s.; F. Gubbins, 10s.; E. Arundel Smith, £1 1s.; H. Green, 2s. 6d.; J. O'Connor, £1; J. H. Bowles, 6s.; H. Brown, 10s.; Rennie Hartley, 10s.; S. C. Merrifield, 4s. 5d.; H. Bedford (2nd donation), 2s. 6d.; Blackburn N.S.S. Branch, 5s.; M. A. Hoole, 6s.; W.M., 10s.; L. G. Warner, 10s.; Nipper, 6s. 3d.; Jas Muir, 2s. 6d.; G. L., 10s. 6d., W. Warner, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. A. Webb, 10s.; L. Finlayson, 5s.; W. J. Mealor, 5s.; F. Akroyd, 10s. 6d.; W. L. Warner, 2s. 6d.; H. Anslow, £1; Mrs. Wood, 5s.; Edward Payne, 5s.; W. Perry, £1; G. Smith, £2; W. Everett, 5s.; A.B., 10s.; D. W. Allan, 5s.; T. H. How, 2s.; M. Ray, £1. Total £402 13s. 10d.

*Corrections.* The amount sent by E. H. Hassell should have been 20s., not 25s. The amount of 21s. attributed to Mr. and Mrs. Warner should have been credited to the West Ham Branch. Amendment of amount previously received has been made.

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 31)

What is the barbarism from which this Bible-reading, family-prayers campaign will save us? Can it be from the belief in witches and clouds of personal devils, in the suppression of opinion, with its modern substitutes for the stake and the torture chamber? Is it feared that without Christianity we may return to the barbaric belief that prayers will cure disease, to a literal hell and geographical heaven? Hitlerism should have taught the lesson that all kinds of brutalities and superstitions may be restored if we commence with controlling the mind of the child, and introduce the Christian penalties for seeking strange gods. Man has not yet developed so much that a retrogression to real barbarism is impossible.

But what we have said is intended to justify our asking every reader of this journal—and those who are not—if what we have said is worth handing on, whether he and she is doing what they can to baulk the efforts of these organizations which are aiming at bringing us back to the mental outlook of the middle ages. Every one of the aims of Hitler and his gang was expressed in the terminology of the "Parents' Association," and the full significance of Hitlerism became clear only when it was able to express itself openly. The machinery of retrogression was well understood by Hitlerism, and they could well have cited the Christian Church to enforce its teachings. Liberty is a very tender plant, and may wither much more rapidly than it grows unless those who really value freedom for all, and not merely for themselves and their party, are not constantly on the alert.

A suggestion comes from one of our readers which we appreciate, because it is one we have had in mind for some time. We are asked, why not have reviews of old books as well as new ones? To that we can only retort, Why not? After all a book is new to the one who first comes across it, irrespective of the date of its publication, and it is not easy for anyone properly to assess the value of a new book unless he has some knowledge of what has gone before. We can, in fact, think of at least six reasons why old books should be reviewed. (1) To enable readers to form an opinion as to whether a recently published book represents an advance on what has already been done. (2) To introduce old books of value that the ordinary reader is not likely to come across. (3) Because reading worth-while old books develops in one a sense of the organic unity of human thought. (4) Because reading old books may throw light on the subject matter of a new book. To know what has been tried and failed may be as important in its way as to know what is held to be right to-day. (5) Unconsciously to develop in the mind of the reader that sense of evolution without which his thought is bound to be more or less fragmentary if not chaotic. (6) Reading old books

of value introduces a reader to a first-hand acquaintance with writers that he may know only as a name, and so enlarges the intellectual horizon.

Now here are half-a-dozen reasons (anyone may easily add to the number) why book reviewing of old books should be practised. We might have added that an acquaintance with old books would place readers at the mercy of that pest of the literary world—the book-maker. We mean by this the one who writes enough to present the world with a volume, not because the writer really has anything to say, but because "a man must live," public libraries are handy, and a few weeks is enough to provide a book that will have some sort of a market. These books are turned out by the hundred, and they die almost as soon as they are born. They are the pest of good readers, because they waste his time; and they mislead unwary ones because they are apt to accept these products of the "mugger-up" as being really authoritative.

Mr. H. Cutner is visiting Leicester to-day (January 19), where he will address the Leicester Secular Society at 3 p.m., his subject being, "The War and Religion." We hope there will be a good audience, as the subject, at this time, should prove particularly attractive.

## Freethought and Illusion.

(Concluded from page 22)

WHEN Renan declares that "we search in vain in the collection of Roman Laws before Constantine for any enactment aimed at free thought, or in the history of the Emperors for a prosecution of abstract doctrine," this must be accepted with a certain reservation. The State cult itself, the deification of the Emperors, linked with the "Safety of the Roman State"—must not be impugned. Hence the attitude to Christianity for its hostility thereto. The Christian movement and Church, however it came by its beliefs, once having attained an ascendancy over its rivals was positive as to their validity whatever the differences regarding their interpretation arising within the Institution. Under Byzantium, allied with the State, it shared the shifting fortunes of the Imperial Crown. But in the West on the ruin of the Roman regime, it was enabled to develop from its theocratic basis a form of Socio-cracy which transcended political allegiance to the Sovereign or principality. Treason or rebellion thus became identical with heresy as challenging a rule sanctified by divine grace. Any offender herein seeking to escape from one Kingdom into another was confronted by the same ubiquitous pervading power. A similar Totalitarian principle (as we saw in a previous survey of Islam and Christendom) animated the Mohammedan State or Legal Code, though alien to the medieval system.

These are but adaptations of a notion that besets human consociation in its primal phase and spiritist atmosphere, and expands into quasi-civilizations. In the systems of the Orient it is illustrated by the Brahmanical caste order persisting amid the shifting fortunes of transient Kingdoms; by the ancestral cult of China or the similar national faith of Japan, *Shinto*. In the "New World" it was operative amid the native cultures when first penetrated by Spanish Conquistadores. Those faiths and systems linking some indigenous belief with a regulative code once established, their inhibitions have frustrated a further play of intelligence, discovery, and retarded betterment. Routine fixation of use and wont is a general phenomenon of the mode under which mankind has journeyed through the tragi-comedy of its historic course. *Les morts qui parlent* govern the living; mind is anchylosed by its own prepossessions.

Correlative with these foundations is the institution of slavery. Man is the one animal that preys on its



kind. The ingenious use of fellow beings like beasts of the field for servile or forced labour, secured through war, capture, or barter—the stronger ravening the weaker—is a universal custom. It exists and has existed under all degrees of mildness and brutality through barbarism to comparative civilization. It flourished in the Græco-Roman world, and is justified by Aristotle as the fate of inferior peoples. Under varying phases of adaptation it has affected the status of the craftsman and labourer until emancipatory changes in the modern world, that is, from the seventeenth century on. The Mosaic legislation accepts and treats it specifically:—

Both thy bondmen and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have shall be of the heathen that are round about you, and of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule over one another with rigour.

A further trait in the make up of *la bête humaine* is that sinister delight in the infliction of suffering, in cruelty, sometimes spoken of as "Sadism." Other animals are cruel enough in the pursuit of prey for food. It is left to man to own this distinction, which leads on to violence and war as a short means—other things *unequal*—of securing physical and territorial advantage; to domination for its maintenance. Even with some types it is expressed by sheer blood-lust and joy in killing for no other ulterior motive—shared in nature by the killer whale. . . . The Mongol eruption in Asia of the thirteenth century A.D. is a signal instance.

The good old rule, the simple plan,  
 . . . That they should take who have the power,  
 And he should keep who can.

Though Sadism is largely sublimated with the more advanced and developed peoples, it slumbers in diverse quarters, and is open to resurgence under the stimulus of some malign circumstance.

Such are the conditions through which mankind, in its struggle for survival, has expanded and coalesced into diverse aggregations, systems, nations, and the factors that have maintained therein a measure of indeterminate cohesion. Set against this static directive of arbitrary authority, superstition, and farce is the emergence of a novel dynamical principle which we class as Freedom, Libertarianism. It belongs to the general movement of Modernism though any detailed exposition of its genesis and genius lies beyond our present limits. It may be noted, however, that the British system with the U.S.A. has played a weighty part in its evocation, and it stands in direct antithesis to the prior tradition. As against subordination to casual usurpations it presents individual self-reliance and assertion. To mental proscription it opposes the vista of unfettered inquiry and examination on every theme of human concern or cosmic interest. So it has involved the creation of suitable agencies and institutions for its potent expression: representative responsible government, scientific associations, the discussion forum, Parliament, the Press. From all which arises Public Opinion as the lode star of policy; and the common weal.

These modes had achieved a partial success in the polity of certain States during the nineteenth century. All that was included in the current concept of Progress was rooted in the Libertarian evangel. It was the generous belief of its devotees that once these felicities were displayed before the eyes of mankind they would be eager to embrace them, to throw off their shackles, count no sacrifice too great in the attainment. . . .

The hopes have been destined to frustration.

The Peace settlement at the end of a murderous war, fought, among other things, "to make the world safe for Democracy," endowed a number of States carved out of the former Empires with free institutions and the "right of self-determination." After a short experience these States, with one or two exceptions, have determined themselves out of Parliamentary Government, which has *failed* at their hands; as also in several of the older countries with a similar regime. They have been superseded by dictatorships and oligarchies of sorts, of which the leading type are based on "ideological" formulas of the State and "Totalitarian" doctrines, varying in each case, but moving towards the same end of the robot hordes as a means to power domination by violence and terrorism in every form. The chief carnivores appear at the moment to be seeking some *modus vivendi* to accommodate their rival predations. Japan to establish a "new order" under her ægis in Asia; the Soviet to use Bolshevism in Russia for the world revolution, Dictatorship of the Proletariat and overthrow of Capitalism; Germany as the super-race to subjugate the lesser breeds of Europe, and eventually acquire a world hegemony involving *inter alia* the disappearance of the Britannic Empire; Italy some notion of a new (Italo) Roman Empire—though lacking the Romans. . . . In these attempts we have lately witnessed a trail of resurgent barbarism, war, murder, outrage, rapine extending from Peking to the Atlantic.

So are we doomed to speed from bad to worse,  
 Ever borne backward, drifting whence we came\*

And Britain almost singly, betrayed by "allies," is in a mortal struggle for her integrity, and things which alone give worth and dignity to living. . . . So stark a situation, its causal sequence and portents, remains for further examination.

AUSTEN VERNEY

\* Virgil.

## The Real Unit of Value

PROFESSOR LEVY, in his "Universe of Science," is emphatic in stating that science is the child of civilised society, and that science can be of no value, or indeed meaning, if divorced from reference to people; people meaning our neighbours, ourselves, and everyone else.

So the science of economics and finance is a branch of human activities, and to be really complete every individual alive must be taken into account. A truly complete analysis would need a reference to the activities of every individual. This shows the complexity of the problems concerned. Further than this Professor Levy emphasises the fact that every and any theory is only valid when subjected to the test of experiment. The theory must fit the facts.

The individual biological unit, man, needs water, food and shelter. Security and other interests are more or less necessary.

The more one reads and tries to understand something of the present financial and economic position, the more does one get bewildered. No two individual writers seem agreed in either generalities or details. A great deal of confusion arises over the diverse meaning of words. The word "money" seems after the fashion of such words as religion, mind, and evolution. These words have exactly as many meanings as there are thinking brains in the world. To be plain, the terms and words used bear no exact meaning and are not to be defined. The meaning and logic of the innumerable articles are, one cannot doubt, plain to the writers themselves, only that the readers do not know exactly what meaning the writer intends. To make things clear, words such as "money" would need a definition as long, or indeed longer, than the article in which the word is used, and the definition will include words which again demand just as prolix a definition.



The various discussions are mostly referable to society in the bulk, and at this end of the scale words are so meaningless, as far as exact meanings go, and the problems are so diverse, and the interests so conflicting, that it would be surprising if real agreement did arise.

In general, to solve a biological problem, we begin with the simplest types and follow on to more complex things.

Human society, and its relationships, is a branch of biology, with the whole human race the problem in review.

The science of economics is an effort to describe and bring to simple terms a problem which is likely more complex than any single brain can follow.

Economists differ, not alone because each individual views the matter from a different angle, but in that all the facts—and these facts include everything written on the subject—can scarcely be known to any single mind. Experimental proof of any or all the theories propounded would include changes referable to the whole of human society. Professor Soddy, indeed, says that to put right the present financial chaos no single branch of human activities would escape. No individual but would suffer gain or loss.

A bewildering thing in all these discussions is that there is no referable measuring unit. One need only think of the word "value," and the various values which are put on the word itself.

In biology, which is not an exact science, we have a unit to which most things biological are referable, the single cell. This biological unit has an internal economy and an external economy. Within limits, the biologist knows what each cell needs; not so exactly, the biologist knows something of the external relationships of the cell.

In economics one can take the individual as a similar unit. This gives us a referable standard of value, a standard of which most of us from our own knowledge can make a fair guess at. This standard is the necessities of the individual for bare living, in the shape of food and drink, clothing, housing, and some few extras to these.

For the moment, we may call this standard three pounds a week, on the present value of the pound.

If our economists and financial experts started all discussions with a minimum wage of three pounds a week as the basis of the argument, some of us might be able to follow the reasoning.

The plain man wants to know why society as constituted does not allow him this three pounds a week.

The problem is not whether pounds per week, per individual (or family group of individuals), would be granted by, say, nationalising the banks, as much as whether a legally compulsory minimum wage of something in the neighbourhood of this amount would necessitate nationalising the banks.

In the "Universe of Science" Professor Levy shows that the scientific treatment of a problem consists in isolating the units of the experiment or thought.

What effect would a compulsory wage have on:—

- International relationships,
- Foreign exchanges,
- Tariffs, ...
- Internal value of the pound,
- The cost of living, ...
- The wholesale commodity value,
- War debts, etc., etc.?

When each of these isolated things have been discussed with the minimum wage, we might try then to put the findings together in, as is usually said in scientific circles of to-day, the same frame.

What would be the effect of a minimum wage on each of our problems, and then what effect would it have on society as a whole?

Any medical practitioner, for example, would say right away that such a minimum, if it is possible and practicable, would improve the standard of health of the individual.

Could any medical practitioner say offhand what effect nationalising the banks would have on the health of either the individual or the community? At the moment individual needs seem in the background in these discussions on economics.

Compared to such an experiment as nationalising the banks, or, indeed, the general experiment of Socialism, fixing a minimum wage by law is simple. More than this, if the experiment failed, it would be easily reversible. Such experiments as the Russian effort to bring into being a new system of society will take perhaps generations to decide the harm or benefit of. The experiment of a compulsory minimum wage of somewhere nearly three pounds a week fits easily into the frame of our society, the average brain can understand and discuss such an experiment. And the effect, if harmful, could easily be put right, by either rescinding the measure in toto, or perhaps more easily by reducing the minimum. More than this, such a procedure at least has the fact of being humane in its favour.

What arguments, then, can be brought against this reform, and from what angle do the difficulties arise?

From a cursory examination, one might say that selfishness is the main, if not the only, barrier.

A resolute Government, pledged to this reform and backed by the goodwill of the country generally, could, one would think, adjust things without any very great dislocation of society in general.

And, speaking from a strict biological standpoint, would anyone have real cause for complaint if his standard of living did happen to be reduced to our minimum, granted that the minimum was a fair one?

W. L. ENGLISH

## The Bogey Man

Hush, hush, here comes the Bogey man.—*Old Song.*  
That — Goblin Man. He will beat you, then he'll eat you.—*Ragtime Song.*

FROM the earliest times the feeling of Fear has been exploited by the ruler for the purpose of keeping in subjection the ruled. Most of the Bogey men in olden times—and quite recent times for that matter—existed in the imagination of the oppressed. The object was subtly implanted by the power of suggestion, and its movements and form adroitly manipulated by the ruler. The results were very satisfactory to the latter, and were put to very base uses. Who, amongst us is without his own particular Bogey man? The reader may have painful experiences of the image drawn for him in his childhood days by unthinking elders or guardians, but he would not say "thanks for the memory!" The tired and harassed mother may admonish her wayward offspring with "Behave yourself or I'll give you to the gypsies," or "Here comes a policeman after you." No wonder the juvenile delinquent regards the policeman as an enemy instead of a friend and protector. Later, as an adult, he regards the policeman furtively as he passes by. The alert officer trained in the powers of observation may detect a suspect whose demeanour causes him to act accordingly.

The Bogey Man, then, may be real or imaginary. In either case his presence is disturbing, and may have a devastating effect on mental balance. Unfortunately, the Bogey Man who obsesses us to-day is very real and menacing. Yes, you have guessed it. It is Hitler. And we cannot escape him.

Every newspaper, magazine and periodical gives him pride of place. He figures prominently in every speech; and no matter where you go or what you read, you are confronted by the name *Hitler!* As a comparison between good and evil, and as a means to frighten us, what other name would be so effective? There's a Bogey man for you! What he will do when he gets us in his grip is sufficient to keep the timid awake all the night. Now is not that very good propaganda—for the Bogey Man? As has been remarked in this journal on more than one occasion, "the appetite grows on what it feeds upon."



It happens that there are two other Bogey Men. These are understudies, so to speak, and they can play other parts too. They are known by the names of Mussolini and Stalin. But it is doubtful whether either of them will oust Hitler from his position of Chief Bogey Man, although their records as fear-provoking spectres are pretty bad. In fact many people assert that there is nothing to choose between them. If we are to believe the information derived from authoritative sources the records of the two understudies equal that of the chief performer. Again, many people assert that Stalin's victims exceed in number the victims of Hitler and Mussolini added together, and that the cruelty practised has been more ferocious. Should this be the case, then why does Hitler hold his position as Chief? Recent events have undoubtedly brought Mussolini into derision and contempt, and what can a Bogey Man do to combat *that*? Where there is derision there can be no fear. Stalin is in a different category. Despite "ideological differences," there are many who expect to see him not in the role of understudy, but in the rival role—of *layer* of Bogies, in short, playing in Britain's side. We are more concerned with events that occur near at hand than those which take place afar off. The proximity of Hitler assumes a more menacing aspect, in fact, his nocturnal visitations are heard, and the effect thereof seen, by many. He comes "to fright the souls of fearful adversaries."

During warfare the Bogey Man takes various forms, for variety is the spice of fear as well as life. As warfare increases in intensity and ferocity, so our fears increase in similar proportions, and hate finds an outlet for expression.

"Judgment thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason."

Yes, indeed, men lose their reason. Goaded by fear, and with the object of their hate ever before them, men are led to perform terrible deeds, until rivers of blood satiate their terrible thirst, and they sink to the earth exhausted and replete.

We have seen how man is kept in subjection by a state of fear, inculcated by the ruler. When war comes the hate which is engendered in the ruled, is diverted to an outside object, that is, *abroad*. Otherwise the ruler might have the force, now unleashed, directed against *him*. Hate has now a definite objective significance. The enemy is without and not within the gates as yet, but, alas will soon be striving for admission.

In times of peace the Bogey Man is something intangible, indefinite, but always active. We know why. "The fault is in ourselves that we are underlings."

At the termination of the Great War the Bogey of Fear was laid. Laid, but not buried, as events proved. Resurrected by the malign spirits of greed, envy, cupidity, "ranging for revenge, with Atê . . . hot from Hell," the story is being re-enacted. The Bogey has become real and is personified in Hitler.

Only when man has a rational view of life will these Bogies be forever laid.

S. GORDON HOGG

Correspondence

DETECTIVE FICTION AND THE WAR.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—In your December 15th issue, "S. H." writes that those who predicted the decline of the detective novel were false prophets. I agree, but from another angle. They overestimated public intelligence.

I wonder how far our failure to prevent this war is due to this kind of escapism. On the same page is an excellent article by Mr. Du Cann dealing with the

past record of a Cabinet Minister. An enlightened and politically minded people could have acted as a corrective through those critical years, but they were too busy with their dope, which "S. H." calls escapism.

"With theatres closed, the hours of cinemas curtailed, and even the pubs, shutting their doors during the nightly alert, more and more people are being driven upon books . . . the detective story writer has to play his part," writes "S. H." (italics mine). Exactly. A mob of Hollywood fans and pub-crawlers are driven, like so many sheep, to the detective thriller. The genuine book lover needs no driving.

I would like to know the proportion of paltry fiction read in this country, as against educative non-fiction. It would run to a pretty big telephone number. At the moment I have waited five weeks for a non-fiction book to be obtained through a county library. I could get an Edgar Wallace locally in five minutes.

G. H. TAYLOR.

A NEW YEAR LETTER

(To anyone who cares to read it)

SIR,—We are facing a year which must to some extent forecast the future and the destiny of the human race, if only by still letting loose the destructive forces now placed by science at our disposal. Wherever this destiny may lead it can never be settled on the shifting sands of religious faith and its beliefs. With the infinite variety and the many contradictions which mark their development, they have one common origin in the animism of primitive man, which has been termed, "the childlike science of the savage."

But religion brings with it many consolations (Herbert Spencer did not lose sight of this aspect) to those who feel no urge to fit faith into facts, as the current sweeps us along on the tide of thought freed from the setbacks and penalties imposed upon it by beliefs for which religion must be held responsible. Apart from modern enlightenment, history shows again and again how many of its blackest pages all due to religious strife when backed by physical force, belief spread, as in earlier times, by the sword. A robust generation of Free-thinkers can now look to a future with less dissipation of energy, mental and moral in useless fields.

There is one subject, in this relation, can be touched on here. Many of the Churches, the "temples" raised by and now shattered by humanity, must not be rebuilt to house their dwindling congregations, in the case of City churches, non-existing. As shrines of art, now lost for ever, their loss is, of course, irreparable, and is shared with many other priceless structures and their contents. But as regards all shades of thought, it will be generally agreed that what presses—when opportunity offers—is the rebuilding of homes such as will lend themselves to the leading of decent lives. That is one of the ways in which the destruction going on under our own eyes, will benefit generations to come. And there are many opportunities for using present losses and breaks with the past for good ends, if these can be kept free from the religious element which still seeks to hand on its legends as truths to those who are young enough or susceptible enough to accept them as such from their instructors, whether in Church or School.

MAUD SIMON

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