

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions

### God, Man and Society

ONE must not place too great a reliance on popular maxims. Theoretically they represent the precipitated experience of the ages. Actually they are often misleading generalizations based on selected experiences. There is, for example, "Necessity is the mother of invention," which may mislead unless "necessity" is made to cover every form of desire, and we rule out accidental happenings. Or, "There is a soul of goodness in things evil." One might reverse that and say there is a soul of evil in things good, for often the same fundamental promptings may lead in one or the other direction. There are very few of these slabs of ready-made wisdom that will not yield conflicting counsel. So let us beware of these short cuts to philosophy.

There is, however, one maxim, supplied by W. S. Gilbert—who gave us as much canned wisdom as any one of his generation—that is as good as any. "There is wisdom in the folly of a fool." That is attractive, because folly and wisdom are often near neighbours, and in any case even a fool cannot at times protect himself against saying something sensible. Gilbert's saying was, however, very neatly endorsed the other morning when I tuned in for the 8 o'clock news. In these days nearly everyone is anxious to get the news, and this gives the B.B.C. an opportunity for playing one of those mean tricks on the public in which the B.B.C. is so expert where religious interests are concerned. Most of us tune in a little before 8 o'clock in order not to miss any of the news. And at 7.55, as certain as the visits of the tax-collector and about as welcome, there comes, under the guise of five minutes friendly talk, as stupid a religious address as one could hear. The whole proceeding is replete with cant and cunning. If the 7.55 horror was to become the 8.5 one, I am quite sure that "That's the end of the news," would mean a general switching off. As it is the listener is caught in a trap, which is not made pleasanter because he enters it voluntarily.

The only redeeming feature of this display of religious cunning is that the name of the speaker is never given, and the B.B.C. never reprints these out-rages on fair play and common sense. I would suggest that the 7.55 speakers be engaged to give our troops, say, a fifteen minutes talk before they are sent against the enemy. Compelled to listen, the men would be roused to such fury that their attack on the enemy would be devastating. The address would certainly remove all fear from death. It might even make it attractive. The only objection to this would be that such a service might be barred under the in-

ternational agreement forbidding the use of explosive bullets.

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### Man and Men

The passage that caught my attention, and which roused hopes that for once the speaker had accidentally strayed into the path of common sense was "Most people when they come into this world appear to think the world owes them a debt. But it is we who owe the world a debt." The idea appeared to be capable of a sensible, even a scientific interpretation. But the speaker's conclusion was that we really owed a debt to God. And that made for pure nonsense. Debts and duties are only possible between equals. I have duties towards my fellow men because we meet on a common ground where the duties are reciprocal. He and I may injure or benefit each other. But what relation have I with God—assuming that he, or she, or it, exists? Even if he created me, the obligation must rest with him and not with me. Unless it is held that non-belief in gods threatens their very existence. In that case I might agree. But reciprocity lies at the very root of the conception of duty.

Properly handled there was just enough truth—badly expressed—to make the two sentences I have cited interesting. But it would have involved handling the subject from the point of view of an evolutionary sociology, and that would not have fitted into the cunning and cowardly religious policy of the B.B.C. So we were left up against a blank wall, wondering how we can owe a debt to anyone or to anything that cannot benefit from our payment or suffer from our non-payment. The mystery of godliness, the folly of fools and the cunning of knaves, run well together.

Now I think that there is very good ground for one who is brought into this world by no act of his own, or her own, for deciding that society does really owe one something. In a rough and ready, and an imperfect way society does recognize that much. And I think the claim may be made, not on any ground of mere sentiment, or of philanthropy, but on that of a strictly scientific understanding of the nature of social evolution. Very common is the statement that a man has a right to do as he pleases with his own. That might be allowed if we could settle clearly what is a man's own, that is what does he produce by himself, that is free from a contribution made by others? Is it ideas? Surely not, for behind every idea there is a history, and without that historical basis and contribution the idea would not be what it is. Is it inventions that may bear a man's name? We may, it is true, trace the maturing of an idea in the mind of a man, but if we are curious enough and intelligent enough to work backward, we shall find the constituents of that idea developing in a succession of generations, and that without that succession the idea in its mature form would not exist.

It is a mere convenience that leads us to attribute the theory of universal gravitation to Newton, or that of evolution to someone else, of Natural Selection to Darwin, of a special economic theory to Karl Marx. In each of these, and in all similar instances, whether we are dealing with great things or small ones, we are summing up an historic process. We talk of the work of different men, when for an understanding of social evolution we should bear in mind the



work of *Man*. It is this process I had in mind when I recently said that all evolution is history, and all history is evolution. This is, of course, no denial of individual greatness or of individual genius; it is only an understanding of the growth of individual greatness as an expression of social evolution. For the greatest genius must have *something* on which to work. The only exception is the Christian God when he created the world out of nothing. But valuable as "nothing" would be to us at present for the making of guns and ships, to use religious language God has never revealed where that inexhaustible product is situated. God monopolized the material and kept secret the method of its manipulation.

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### Man and the Race

To-day we talk glibly of social evolution. But how many of us really appreciate the full significance of the phrase? We talk of man as a gregarious animal, but he is more than that; he is a *social* animal, and this lifts gregariousness to another, a distinct, a "higher," category. So far as I can recall the fact, the first man to emphasize the scientific value of the distinction was that neglected genius George Henry Lewes. In one of his least known works he points out that to the normal environment of gregarious animals man develops a distinct form of environment. He develops articulate speech, without which no great degree of intelligence is possible. It is chiefly by this instrument that the slow method of animal adaptation to environment is gradually replaced by a conscious mastery of surroundings. He makes tools and so adds to his power of work. He manufactures weapons and establishes dominance over the animal world. He grows his food instead of finding it, and so is enabled to lead a settled life with its enormous repercussions on himself and his fellows. He manufactures clothes and to that extent makes himself independent of his environment. Above all, he creates institutions, and so fixes certain forms of thought without completely endowing them with absolute fixity. He invents, and passes the inventions on to a succeeding generation. The new generation may thus begin where the last left off.

In other words, save for the existence of other animals, animal environment is mainly inorganic. The predominant feature of human society, from the earliest times is that it is predominantly psychological. The difference between finding food and growing it, between making a covering and growing hair or fur for protection, the inheritance of institutions which dictate modes of living to the next generation, above all, the development of language which enables all born into a tribe to inherit everything that has been accomplished, all these, in the sum, constitute a difference in kind. They give us the essential difference between animal and human.

Now this view of human development as a continuous stream, each generation adding its quota for good or ill, in generous or in scanty measure, is neither fanciful nor fantastic. It is a strictly evolutionary statement of fact, and if the B.B.C., instead of draining the dregs of the religious world to give us a daily dose of religious nonsense, had engaged men of ability and honesty to give an early morning talk, they might have provided us with something to think upon during the day.

But what has been said does justify the feeling that the world, the human world, owes a debt to each child that is born into a given community. He has a right—so far as we can admit natural rights—to a share in what his ancestors have helped to create. For an evolutionary sociology must convert society into a kind of entailed estate, and an entail that cannot be broken in fact although it may be ignored by law or custom. In the long travail of the race there has

been built up what we call civilization. Built up, be it noted, not wholly made, by any man or by any generation. Civilization is not made by *men* but by *man*, for in this development men are but indexes on a long and everlasting journey. The man who cried out that the world owed him a debt was right; it was the hired exponent of an unintelligible theory who tried to set aside this claim by appealing to the hollow superstition of a god. The man was right in saying that he had a legitimate claim to a share of the wealth, material, mental and moral, which the ancestors of all of us have helped to produce.

But an entailed estate has two aspects. It confers no absolute right on the one who inherits it. It is his to hold, but not to abuse. He may use it for his own benefit, but he holds it in trust for the benefit of others. The man who feels that he has some claim on the civilization into which he is born is right so far as he claims in the name of his forerunners a share of that which has been created by them. But the same feeling that sanctions this claim also imposes in turn an obligation, that of seeing to it that the civilization of which he is a co-trustee does not suffer from trusteeship. We see this feeling illustrated in the pride that the better class of landowners have taken in the estate that has been handed to them by their predecessors. That has, we all know, sheltered much wrong-doing, fostered much stupid pride, and denied to multitudes a right to which they had a moral claim. But in the main it was sound. What is now needed is that this feeling of pride in families should be extended to the community. We should feel the same pride in feeling that we belong to a community in which the moral claims of each member are recognized, strengthened by a common sentiment—and if necessary enforced by law—that a few now feel in having descended from this or that family.

If we can achieve this we shall do something to justify the claim that we are fighting one of the most ferocious wars in history in order to "preserve" democracy. I prefer to say that we are fighting for the right to create a democracy, for none has ever yet really existed in this country. It is true that neither democracy nor any other system will ever wipe out the distinction between those that are wise and those that are foolish, whatever the level is on which both exist. But "right" and "wrong" are categories made by man, and it is only at its peril that a society may stereotype them into the rulership of one class and the subservience of another.

And now looking back at the B.B.C. parsonette who suggested these notes, I am not a little interested in noting that even a fool may have his uses, and a B.B.C. religious monstrosity lead one to better things. One may really find wisdom in the folly of a fool.

CHAPMAN COHEN

### Renan the Rebel

So far as a man thinks, he is free.—Emerson.

Instead of being made, make yourself.

Herbert Spencer.

At that magnificent and representative collection of French art, which was shown at the Franco-British Exhibition, there was one portrait which impressed the memories of the onlookers. It was Bonnat's portrait of the great Orientalist, Ernest Renan, a masterpiece which presented the man with fidelity and sincerity. The picture was a triumph of artistic genius, for the famous French Freethinker lived once more upon the artist's canvas. Renan was seated, clad in the black broadcloth of a scholar, unrelieved save for the red button of distinction, and the long, unkempt, grey hair. The heavy face, the pendulous cheeks, the eyes of a dreamer and thinker, the long finger-



nails, all formed a perfect portrait of the solitary scholar who shook the Christian world to its foundations.

Ernest Renan never cared for the applause of the world; but he would have smiled his kindly smile if he had known that he was the subject of a really great artist's finest masterpiece. And it is pleasant to think that posterity has a perfect presentation of one of the most accomplished authors and scholars of his generation.

Renan's influence was continuous and enormous from the publication of his famous *Life of Christ*, in which he attempted to write the life of the alleged founder of the Christian Religion whom he had worshipped in his youth. What a tempest the book provoked! It was not unlike, in some respects, the tornado caused by Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. For years it rained pamphlets and books, and thousands of pulpits belched criticisms, abuse, and refutations. Fifteen hundred replies were published within a few months of its appearance. Whether Freethinkers applauded or theologians condemned, none could deny its scholarship or its power. Priests might curse and the pious might sigh, but they both have had to reckon with Renan. Not even the most hidebound and reactionary of the apologists for the Gospel legends have written since as they would have written had Renan's book never been published. It was a famous victory for Freethought, for Renan's kid-glove method is as fatal to religion as Strauss' analytical and critical thoroughness. Airily and daintily, like our own Matthew Arnold, the scholarly Frenchman explained away the magic and wonder of the Christian fables. The result was as deadly as the direct frontal attack of Thomas Paine, although Renan does with an ironic smile what Paine did more soberly. Always under the velvet glove was the gauntlet of steel. The result was decisive, for it has sapped the faith of countless believers for four generations:—

While men believed on earth he went,  
And open stood his grave,  
Men called from chamber, church, and tent,  
And Christ was by to save.  
Now he is dead. Far hence he lies  
In the lorn Syrian Town,  
And on his grave with shining eyes,  
The Syrian stars look down.

The man who could alter the faith of tens of thousands was well equipped for his task, for he was a great writer as well as a complete scholar. In many hundreds of pages Renan showed the sarcastic power of the French language in hands that could evoke its subtleties and wield its trenchant blade. In his hands it was as sharp and effective a weapon as that handled by Edward Gibbon, although many phases in the thousand years of history of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* seem as if they had been made to suit the greatest of all historians who wrote amid the quiet acacias of Lausanne. With his scientific bent on the one side, and his early clerical training on the other, Renan was still at heart Voltairean; witness the following:—

Pious souls, while enjoying the sentiments, full of resignation and tender melancholy, of the Psalms of David, will fancy themselves in communion with this bandit of Adullam and Ziklag. They will believe in a final justice on the testimony of a brigand, who never even thought of it, and of the Sybil, who never existed. O the divine comedy.

Renan's own pilgrimage from Rome to Reason may be traced in his own incomparable language in his book, *Fragments, Intimes et Romanesque*. In it he tells the story of the difficulties and sufferings he endured as he shook off his beliefs one by one; and the series of letters addressed to his friend, the Abbe Liart, show, step by step, how he lost hold of his faith. In the final struggle he is driven to the

Christian Bible itself and to Pascal. In Pascal he found that "the greatest brain that ever existed hardly dared to affirm anything." Then there were domestic troubles; for there were foes in his own household. How Renan's heart-strings were tugged, for his beloved mother was actually looking forward with happy security to his ordination in the Romish Church. As he tells us in the *Souvenirs*, this was a most difficult knot to unravel. "I exerted all my ingenuity," he says pathetically, "in inventing ways of proving to her that I was still the good boy as in the past. Little by little the wound healed. When she saw me still good and kind to her, as I had always been, she relented and owned that there were several ways of being a priest, and that nothing had altered in me but my dress, which was indeed the truth."

The way was smoothed by Renan's brave sister, Henriette. Renan never forgot her help. The touching dedication of his *Life of Jesus* expresses in a few eloquent sentences what he owed to her. The story of his intellectual development he afterwards retold in *Souvenirs*, but that is the memory of a man looking back on the past, with the fragrance and the sadness of the days that are no more. One thing emerges from all his voluminous writings, and that is his complete honesty. Ever a truthseeker, it was this most uncommon quality that laid the sure foundation of his maturer influence and widespread understanding. The real importance of such a fine man as Renan will be found as much in the processes of his quest as in what he discovered.

In all the little ironies of literature there are few things more interesting than that Renan's subjects are chosen from a race of men, as he himself remarks, so utterly and entirely different from himself. But where his theme is one of the heroes of philosophy, Marcus Aurelius or Benedict Spinoza, or the Antonines, his eyes kindle, and his smile is graver. For Renan was imperturbable. Through all the frauds and follies of Supernaturalism he went his quiet way, humming softly to himself. Far off, the busy and noisy world sounded but dimly, but the scholar wrote his books and brought his dream of intellectual liberty within the realm of reality. He was well content, for he knew that he worked at the looms of the future, and, in so doing, added lustre to the long bead-roll of illustrious French Freethinkers.

MIMNERMUS

## Atheism or Agnosticism?

Few questions have worried Freethinkers when they first joined the Greatest of all Causes, more than this one—the problem of adopting the clear, unambiguous title of Atheist, or avowing only what they were pleased to call Agnosticism.

There seemed something too outright and challenging in the word Atheism, something which sounded too awful in Christian ears, especially as one had to live, for the most part, with Christians. Why hurt their feelings? Why not soften the shock of disbelieving in a God, particularly the Christian God, by saying that you do not know if he exists or not, that you simply do not *know*—unlike the positive declaration of the too cocksure Atheist who says defiantly that he *does* know, and that the Christian God no more exists than a Pagan one?

For some of us, the choice was soon made, and we preferred to call ourselves Atheists once for all; others, perhaps not quite so positive in their beliefs, and too sensitive to shock the easily wounded feelings of their pious friends, preferred the word Agnostic or Rationalist. These appellations did not sound quite so bad; and they had the additional advantage of leaving the real problem, so to speak, in the air.

While it is a fact that some definitions of Atheism



merely make the operative word *disbelief* and not *denial*, it is also a fact that the Atheist *does* deny the existence of a God that cannot be defined, or defined, in terms which are either meaningless or contradict themselves. The Christian himself denies Apollo or Adonis or Jupiter—as Gods they must have been impossible in the way they have been described to us. In fact, the Christian will deny ninety-nine Gods but affirm one—his own—and he will become very angry if that God is not accepted. He—the Christian—is a true Atheist where all other Gods but his own are concerned; yet he uses the most vituperative language against anyone who denies his own particular God.

All this is quite elementary, I admit, for many Freethinkers; but we are constantly adding to our forces; and the recruit is very often held back because the Christian has surrounded the word Atheist with such obloquy and hatred that he hesitates to use it, and very often thinks that he is safe in the arms of Agnosticism—the we-don't-know-if-there-is-a-God-or-not attitude. It is only fair to state that what Professor Huxley himself said about the term when he invented it is not so well known. It would come as a surprise in many cases to the gallant recruit.

The history of Atheism actually has a long and honourable record behind it. It would take too long to give even a short bibliography, but most people who have professed the creed know of, if they have not actually read, D'Holbach's *System of Nature*, a long and splendid exposition of the many sides to the great problem. But written in the eighteenth century, it must be confessed that for the modern reader it is just a little out of date—though still of immense value. Later, there was Holyoake's famous *Trial of Theism*—the best thing he wrote, in my opinion. Foote said of it that "he made that ancient faith look a frightful old impostor." In spite of that, Holyoake never liked the word Atheism, and at one time tried to introduce instead the word Cosmism. When Huxley, who did not like, or said he did not like, Atheism either, invented the word Agnosticism, Holyoake clung to it as a description of his faith with touching pertinacity. He and Foote had a rare old tussle on the problem in these pages just about forty years ago, and the resulting pamphlet, *What is Agnosticism?* is still worth reading and studying. Holyoake appealed to Ingersoll, who had used the word Agnostic as applicable to himself; Foote promptly proved that Ingersoll had written in the clearest way that "The Agnostic is an Atheist. The Atheist is an Agnostic." But it is noticeable that Foote preferred to state that the real meaning of Atheism was "without" God. "An Atheist is one without God. That is all the A before Theist really means," said Foote. "Now I believe the Agnostic is without God too. Practically at any rate he is in the same boat with the Atheist."

Bradlaugh, who always proudly professed complete Atheism, wrote two pamphlets in the sixties of last century, *Is There a God?* and *A Plea for Atheism*, both of which, in their day, did immense service in making the hated word popular among his followers. He based his reasoning of the problems involved on Spinoza, and used some of that great philosopher's terminology. But this century has seen tremendous strides made in science, and the application of new scientific methods over the whole domain of learning. A new statement of the question of Atheism, based on the results of the latest scientific researches in the history of religions, in psychology and anthropology, was long wanted. In *Theism or Atheism* the indefatigable editor of this journal has dealt lengthily and succinctly with the God-idea, and readers will find in that work arguments for Atheism which most Theists would rather ignore. They are—to me at least—unanswerable.

But there is always room for a short authoritative statement put in language easily understood by almost anybody, and not requiring a long course of philosophical studies as a background. And here they are, Nos. 15 and 16 of Chapman Cohen's *Pamphlets for the People*, entitled *Agnosticism or . . . ?* and *Atheism*.

Readers of the *Freethinker* will not need telling that both these pamphlets are marked with their author's enviable gifts of making a difficult subject exceptionally clear, informative, and interesting. He plunges straight away into the heart of the problem, and the reader is carried away into the discussion and made to see its relevant factors; and before he knows exactly where he stands, he will find himself agreeing with the writer, and hating the word Agnosticism like poison—or at least he ought to. That gentle persuasive manner of Mr. Cohen is very deceiving, and there are few of us who can withstand it.

One thing stands out clearly. Just as, according to Foote, Holyoake's *Trial of Theism* made "that ancient faith look like a frightful old impostor," so Mr. Cohen makes Agnosticism, a much newer faith, look even more than a frightful old impostor. He analyses it, dissects it, microscopically examines its component parts, and contemptuously throws them to the wind. There is a death sting in almost all his arguments.

How does he do this?

That the reader must find out for himself. For the expenditure of three pennies he will be provided with most of the arguments he will need against those who still insist on calling themselves Agnostics. And he will thereafter not only be proud to join those of us who prefer the unequivocal word Atheist, but will always be able to argue with those who don't—and win. The question will no longer worry him.

By the way, Mr. Cohen in quoting Miss Kingsley, called her Florence instead of Mary. It is the only slip I came across.

H. CUTNER

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## Secret Inventions

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When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (1 Cor. xiii. 11.)

An ideal of the apostles which he was unable to realize in his life! His persecution of the Christians, and his admissions, e.g., "I speak as a fool" (2 Cor. ii. 23), etc., providing ample evidence of his inability to do so.

It still is a much needed ideal, outside the grasp of humanity.

When children quarrel, if close contact is not advisable, they look for the nearest stone or stick to throw at their adversaries. And when they become men, instead of putting away childish things, they continue to fight, and lest there should be any difficulty in finding childish things to throw at one another, they manufacture them all the year round.

Man's genius enables him to invent deadly things to use in attack, or defence, and most of these childish things he treasures. But some of them, it would appear because of their very deadly nature, are never patented. Some curious records of these are very interesting. The following instance of one of them may be worth a moment's attention:

Lord Napier—1550-1617—(John Napier, laird of Merchiston, Scotland) wrote a book on the Apocalypse, in which he gave some good-counsel to King James. He believed in Astrology, and was addicted to divination, but was sane enough, withal, to invent (1614) logarithms. He was also addicted to mechanical invention. As the following brief account taken



from *The Percy Anecdotes*, Vol. 6, pp. 49-50, bears witness:—

In the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth Palace, there is a curious paper preserved amongst the MSS. of Anthony Bacon, Esq., written by Lord Napier, entitled, "Secret inventions profitable and necessary in these days for the defence of this island, and withstanding of strangers, enemies to God's truth and religion." These inventions are four in number, all of which Lord Napier said he hoped to perform. The third is the most curious; it is the invention of a piece of artillery, which would destroy a whole army, or cut down the masts of and tackling of a whole fleet, at once.

Sir Thomas Urquhart (1611-1663), of Cromarty, Scotland (the famous translator of Rabelais), in his *Jewel*, mentions such a machine as having actually been constructed. Napier, he says, "had the skill, as is commonly reported, to frame an engine (for an invention not unlike that of Archytas's (390 B.C.) Dove—which, though wooden, could fly—which by virtue of some secret springs, inward resorts, with other implements and materials for the purpose, inclosed within the bowels thereof, had the power, if proportionable in bulk to the action required of it (for he could have made it of all sizes), to clear a field of four miles in circumference of all the living creatures exceeding a foot in height that should be found thereon, how near soever they might be found to one another; by which means he made it appear that he was able, with the help of this machine alone, to kill 30,000 Turks without the hazard of one Christian. And he goes on to relate how at a demonstration of this machine, given on a large plain in Scotland, a great many head of cattle and flocks of sheep were destroyed.

When on his deathbed, a number of the inventor's friends thought it a thousand pities that the *secret* of such an "excellent" invention should die with him, and they implored him, for the honour of his family, and his own everlasting memory to posterity, to reveal the manner and contrivance of so ingenious a mystery. His answer was:—

That for the ruin and overthrow of man there were too many devices already framed, which if he could make to be fewer, he would with all his might endeavour to do; and that, therefore, seeing the malice and rancour rooted in the heart of mankind will not suffer them to diminish the number of them, by any new conceit of his they should never be increased.

GEORGE WALLACE

### R. L. S. Made Truthful

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote:—

UNDER the wide and starry sky  
Dig the grave and let me lie  
Glad did I live and gladly die  
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you gave me:  
"Here he lies where he longed to be  
Home is the sailor, home from sea  
And the hunter home from the hill."

Truth compels a re-writing:—

Under the wide and starry sky  
Dig the grave and let me lie  
Glad did I live but sadly die  
And I died in spite of my will.

This be the verse you gave for me:  
"Here he lies where he feared to be  
Gone is the sailor, lost at sea  
And the hunter gone from the hill."

C. G. L. DU CANN

## Acid Drops

With a loud flourish the *News-Chronicle* announced that it would open a "national discussion under the general heading of God and the War." It is to be "open to the public," also, "The discussion will be open and vital, not a mere statement of beliefs." To secure this open and vital discussion "leaders of thought in varied fields of religion and social activity" will be drawn upon. It aims at "an all-round discussion of present-day thought." An excellent programme—on paper. How does it work out in practice?

Judging from the preliminary list of those who will take part in this discussion the prospects of a full and free discussion do not look very promising—or rather the promise is that it will be a game of bluff. In the issue of the paper for January 21 a list of 13 names is given. Of this eleven five are what we may call professional believers, that is it is their business to advocate Christianity, three are, we believe, Christians, two are religious, and there is a "Private Soldier," whose opinions we do not know, but can guess that he will, at most criticize the *Churches*. That is not very promising for a discussion that is said to aim at giving us an "all-round discussion of present-day thought." Speaking generally we believe that we could set down a very fair picture of what each of the eleven chosen ones will say. And the editor of the *News-Chronicle* must be less wide-awake than we believe he is, if he could not give a forecast of the essays also. There is one Jewish Rabbi, but he may be trusted to follow the Christian lead.

We wonder when an editor of one of our leading newspapers will have the courage to stage a *real* discussion in which representatives of religion and non-religion, and anti-religion will all be given an opportunity to join in such a discussion. We have little hope of finding this will be the case in the present discussion, and we feel equally confident if real representatives of "the other side" were announced as being among the contributors that some of the selected would decline to take part in it. Somehow the army of God seem able to advance on the enemy when he is not in sight. At sight they find they have other business on hand. And that is usually true of the letters that follow from the public. It is astonishing how few of these catch the editor's eye. It seems to be his business—or that of one of his "subs"—to see that few, and only the weakest, ever see the light.

Here is a sample of the way things are "worked." Mr. Gordon Beckles, in the *Daily Express*, has been advocating increased war-work on Sunday, with scant regard for the Lord's Day Observance Society, of which our Lord Chancellor is a member, and was its President. (How such a man became Lord Chancellor is one of the mysteries of the political world). But in the course of his article he remarks that Russia has "abolished Sundays," but it was the five year plan, not Atheism that prompted a working week of six days. This is not quite correct. The Russian workman has, we believe, five day's work with one day's rest. Sunday appears just as an ordinary day. It is not a "sacred" one. Here Sunday is God's day, and the only occasion on which its non-recognition is excused is when we are arming to kill some of his children on the other side of the North Sea, or prevent their killing us. In such circumstances God takes a back seat, and the camouflage of depending on God becomes too ridiculous for anyone save parsons, religious fanatics, and those politicians who think it pays to put on a solemn air of idiotic piety every now and again.

The Vatican radio is not satisfied with present-day films. It complains that "there are films portraying social justice, but without a mention of God. Indeed rarely is there any mention of something explicitly Christian. God is seldom brought in and the omission is deplorable." The Vatican exaggerates the situation. We have seen many films in which there have appeared scenes in which sentimental puerilities play a great part. And there is nothing easier than to work a miracle on



the films. It can deceive the eye quite as efficiently as the Church can deceive the mind. After all the influence of the worst of films cannot make for anything like the evil that the influence of the Church does.

The Vatican Radio has denounced the Oxford Group Movement. It says the movement "is full of danger and therefore must not be tolerated secretly." We agree with what the Vatican says about the Oxford Movement with regard to its quality and influence, but for different reasons. The Vatican is ready to denounce anything that does not make for the aggrandisement of Rome. But when it talks of the evil moral influence it exerts it must be said that its influence, sexually and otherwise, is not greater than that of the Roman Church, or of other branches of the Christian family. As liars the Oxford converts follow the example of all other Christian movements that make a parade of converts. In supplying, under a disguised form, an abnormal eroticism it falls into line with the abnormal stress the whole of the Christian Church has laid upon the sex side of life, and if any Roman Catholic wishes to see this well exhibited a study of the lives of the Saints provides a plentiful supply of admirable material. Chapman Cohen's *Religion and Sex* furnishes a useful study in this direction.

Mr. Bullett, the American statesman, says that an American takes orders only from God. That doesn't seem a difficult position to master, and should offer no great difficulty to anyone. For each one who believes in taking orders from God has to say what these orders are, and also to interpret them to his own satisfaction. If all practised that, there could be no difference between God and his followers, although there might be a devil of a row between the different recipients of God's orders. But there would be no differences of opinion between God and *Me*.

The Bishop of Worcester has the backing of the *Times* (January 16), in the declaration that "No scheme of national reconstruction can be adequate which does not include such changes in our system of national education as will make it broadly, but definitely, Christian in purpose." The application of "broadly" in this statement is that it must suit all the main Christian sects, and "definitely Christian in purpose" means that teachers and the school atmosphere must be such that children are trained in such a way as to leave school without any doubts concerning the truth of Christianity. History will be prostituted to that purpose, and children will be taught as certainties what are matters of keen dispute among Christians themselves. A more villainous exploitation of children in the interests of churches it is difficult to conceive.

It is useless looking to any of the political parties, Conservative, Liberal or Labour, for any reasonable and conscientious action in this matter. In each case party interests and individual regard for individual political "careers" will take precedence of principle. And in this very peculiar democracy of ours the demoralizing value of the old school tie, the semi-conscious prostration of a "lower" class to an "upper" one, and the power of organized religions must be counted as more powerful than principle. The Churches have been gaining ground in the schools, and unless those who detest using children as the raw material out of which sheer superstition is to be kept alive, really busy themselves, the prospect is that even though Hitlerism is beaten in its German form we shall end the war with finding it established in the schools.

So once again we ask Freethinkers to get to work. They can, while they have still the power, not merely withdraw their own children from religious instruction, they can induce many of the more liberal-minded of the religious world to follow their example. That in itself would help to weaken the cry that we are a Christian people, and prove that we are only a people with whom an undefined "Christianity" still has considerable power. And Freethinkers can circulate literature that

will open the eyes of many to the justice of our claim that the schools must not be used, nor children considered as mere pawns, for promoting sectarian interests. The Churches have shown that they will permit nothing to stand in the way of their seeking increased power. Freethinkers, who have a really sound social principle to enforce, should show that they are not less interested in saving the child from the machination of the priest.

There is a religious journal called *The Protestant Woman*, which has discovered a clear proof of the activity of God in some of the recent raids on this country. Here is something from the pen of the editor which is worth recording in these days when parsons show what little real trust they have in God when they sandbag his altars, and tell their congregations that they can find better protection in an unconsecrated dug-out than is provided in God's own house. Here is the passage. The editor points out that "When bombs recently rained on the City of London the so-called 'high altar' in St. Paul's Cathedral was demolished while the rest of the building was left intact. Was not the hand of God in it, casting down what should have no place in the reformed Church of England?" The lady, we think, is not quite accurate, for other parts of St. Paul's were damaged. And it really is mean, after God doing nothing against the "high altar" for so long, taking advantage of a war to direct a bomb at this offensive high altar. It almost looks as though he is in communication with the "enemy," and that to-day is a very serious offence. For he evidently did not prevent any of the bombs falling on dwelling houses or on business ones. He just took a mean and traitorous advantage of the occasion to bomb the altar. A question might be asked in Parliament about it.

The Lord is no respecter of persons. Two Salvation Army lasses were selling *War Cries* and courageously serving tea every night during air raids in London. Owing to the exceptional severity of the raid on one night recently they returned to their local headquarters and sat by the fireside reading the Bible. A bomb fell on the house and both were killed. And yet every time a Bible stops a bullet (which occurs, oh, so frequently!) the value of the Bible as a talisman is seized upon by our Christian press.

The Pope claims to have nearly four hundred million followers in the world. We do not know whether the figures are accurate or not. We do know that there are a hell of a lot of Roman Catholics about, and that Roman Catholic leaders never stick at a lie when it pays to tell it. But what the Pope wants is one penny from each in support of foreign missions. Which reminds us of a very old saying that fools and their money are soon parted. And there is no shortage of knaves on such an occasion to make the collection.

The *Sun* (Australia) for November 26, has made an appeal for books for the benefit of the Australian Navy. It closes the appeal by saying, "Everything except cookery, religious works, or volumes on beauty treatment, will be greatly appreciated." The italics are ours. Would any English paper have the courage to disqualify, publicly, religious books? We feel sure none would. And if they did there would be a hell of a row.

The *Church Times* is looking forward to a time when the "meanest of citizens" will "be assured of something more than a tolerable existence, and some share of all the good gifts of God." The trouble is that God appears to have sent a great many of his good gifts to the wrong addresses, or else the parcels were put together in a very careless manner. But the historic teaching of the Church has, we confess, helped to readjust things. For it is explained that riches are a snare, and that it is the duty of the people to obey those who are placed in authority above. As the New Testament explains, good Christians must "render obedience to the powers that be," and resistance to these powers deserves damnation. There is great comfort in Christian teaching—if it is read properly.



## TO CORRESPONDENTS

For Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—W. Maybank, £2 2s.

E. J. HUGHES.—Next week.

T. F. THOMPSON.—The best thing for you to do is to settle in your own mind exactly what it is you are trying to explain, or what it is you wish to explain. If you are looking for "things" apart from what is before you, you are chasing a nightmare. Resolve "matter" into atoms, and you have only exchanged one experience for another—that is, so far as you picture an atom as something conceivable. If you try to think of it as something else, or so far as you think of it as something else, you are in no better position than the believer in God who attributes everything to that source. Get hold of the fact that all our explanations, so far as they are sound, are translation of experience, and you will have gone a long way towards understanding.

A. C. ROSETTI.—A great many of our readers have been very badly hit by the war. We appreciate the more those who do what they can to help the War Damage Fund. And with many helpers the burden need not be greater than they feel they can bear. We would say here how greatly we appreciate those who have written to say they are unable to give any help whatever. In their case we readily take the will for the deed. And, after all, even this war will not last for ever.

C. A. LAMONT.—The greatest personal trouble we have experienced from the war has been having to distribute a large number of our books with various friends in order to prevent their complete destruction by a bomb. And, as is to be expected, nearly always the ones we happen to want most urgently are those that are not to hand. It is astonishing how often we need what we haven't got, and how often we should not need it if we had it. All we can do in such cases is curse Hitler—and others—and get on as we can.

J. SNAITH.—We have read your letter with interest, but you must not expect Christians to explain the mysteries of their faith. The mere suggestion that such should be done is enough to make a genuine believer get out of your company as quickly as possible.

P. G. TACCHI.—Thanks for letter and kind wishes reciprocated; paper sent to addresses for four weeks.

P. G. TACCHI.—Yes, things have changed since those days we first fraternized. We shall be very pleased to see you again any time you are in London. We cheerfully take the will for the deed with regard to the Fund. Many friends have written to the same effect, and, except that we regret the fact that the war has hit them hard, we value their letters very much. Thanks also for other offer, but we hope to remain where we are for the "duration."

H. BLYTHE.—We agree with you that, considering the times, our "War Damage Fund" has done well. We hope to close in before, or by the end of February. Thanks for your own subscription.

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.

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

## War Damage Fund

Previously received, £414 19s. 5d.; E. W. Jones, 5s.; Mrs. E. M. Sandys, 10s. 6d.; J. B. Hindley, £1 1s.; "Islay" Freethinker, 5s.; H. J. Hewer, 2s. 6d.; Thos. Roberts, 5s.; C. R. Vick, £1; "A Reader," 5s.; T. H. Burgess, 5s.; W. Robson, 10s.; J. S. Buckle, £3; H. Blythe, 10s.; E. Bryant, £1. Total £423 18s. 5d.

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.

## Sugar Plums

We feel very uneasy as we think will the majority of those who are interested in the freedom of the press, and certainly those who write, honestly, for the press, over the suppression of the *Daily Worker*. The liberty of the press has been sufficiently curtailed as it stands, and the suppression of a paper on the ukase of an official establishes a precedent that is pregnant with danger. The normal way where a newspaper publishes something that is considered to be illegal is for the paper to be brought before a court and the alleged offence made plain—or dismissed. But in the present case it is not a specific article, or a number of cited articles that is named, the paper is simply suppressed because a Government official thinks it hinders the progress of the war. And that we say is a custom foreign to our traditions, and savours rather too much of the kind of thing that most of us wish to destroy.

We have here no concern with the purpose for which the *Daily Worker* exists, nor its policy, nor its tone. And we shared the surprise, or the shock, felt when from clamouring for war with Germany, and charging political ministers with being in sympathy with Nazism, it, directly after the Russian-German pact, turned right about face and demanded peace with Hitler. But the fact that the *Daily Worker* stands for a policy to which the majority are opposed is an additional reason why any charge against it should be specific, and, so far as is possible, under ordinary process of law. It is the suppression of a newspaper, not its punishment or persecution for publishing an article, that is of importance here. With the paper control in operation the Government can prevent any other paper being published which is under the same ownership as the *Daily Worker*.

We hope the matter will be raised very early in Parliament, and we hope also that the Government will be induced to make a specific charge, and that the general public will get a fair report in the ordinary press. The freedom to print unobjectionable matter has never been denied. It exists even in Germany to-day.

The incident connected with the name of Colonel Bingham, so far as the Government is concerned, is at an end. Just at the time when we were showering praise on the Australian soldiers—who are not affected by the "old school tie" mania—just as we were praising the gallantry of our airmen, boasting that but a few months ago some of the most daring of them were serving in offices, standing behind a counter, or otherwise engaged in commercial enterprises, we were informed through the Colonel's letter to the *Times* that it is only the "upper classes," or the products of our public schools, that are fitted for command. The middle and lower classes have "very largely fallen down on their jobs." Forced to take notice the Government, through Captain Margesson, announced that the Colonel had broken a rule of the services which forbade him making any such communication to the public without securing permission, and had been relieved of his position. To use a vulgar term, he had been "sacked." He had fallen down on his job.

So far, so good, but when pressed to say whether the Government shared Colonel Bingham's views, Captain Margesson said he could not usefully add to his answer, which looks as though Captain Margesson had broken down on his job. But Colonel Bingham's opinion is of no particular value to the public. But the public is, or ought to be, concerned with the statement that the larger section of the public is unfitted for responsible positions in the army or any other service; these must be reserved for the members of the aristocracy, and for the products of our public schools. And that is a lie and an insult to the community. It is one of the faults of our society that must be remedied if we are ever to be a democracy in fact. For democracy does not rest on each man and woman having a vote. It rests rather on a sense of social equality, on the feeling that each one of us, to whatever class of society he belongs, has a legitimate claim to a share of the civilization one has inherited, and the legal right to a maximum of benefit proportional to the ability of each to earn it.



Those who have any knowledge of the affairs of this country know well enough that the "great families" still exercise a power greater than they should be permitted to have in the control of the country's affairs. They know also that in any attempt to reach commanding positions in the civil service of the country the "old school tie" operates against the man of "lowly origin." We have even heard in such cases as the appointment of a secretary to a county cricket club, the question asked whether the candidate was a public school boy. And all those who are acquainted with what goes on behind the scenes with regard to our primary and secondary schools, know that the aim has been for years to keep the educational standard as low as possible in order to make it easier for those from public schools to achieve the higher positions in the civil services.

Colonel Bingham's opinions do not matter in the least, but he serves as a specimen case to the sociologist, and indicates a very unpleasant feature of our political and social life. The army of to-day is not the army of a couple of generations ago, and, given the opportunities, educational, social and other, the "middle" and the "lower" classes have the same qualities of mind and character—good and bad—as have the upper class. We make the claim to the world that we are protecting a democracy. We have no *real* democracy to defend. The "lower classes" are too much inclined to look up to a "higher" class for that to exist. But we have what is of inestimable value, and that is the legal right to create a genuine democracy when this war is over. And there will be needed all our wits, when the war is over, to create that genuine democracy. Meanwhile we should like to see Colonel Bingham expressing the opinions contained in his letter to a few thousand airmen or to the Australian soldiers.

The *Freethinker* for 1940, strongly bound in cloth, gilt-lettered, and with title page, will be ready very shortly. Would those who require the volume kindly send their order without delay? There will be extra cost entailed this year in rebinding this volume owing to increased prices of paper, etc., but the price will remain as usual, 17s. 6d., plus 1s. postage. Orders will be executed in rotation, and it will not, in the circumstances, be possible to bind further volumes for those who do not place their orders now.

We have received the Annual Report of the Leicester Secular Society, and we congratulate all concerned, that in spite of all the difficulties of the past year they have kept the flag flying. There is a very small deficit on the year, but the expenditure on propaganda might easily be greater if the "sinews of war" were stronger. Perhaps some of our readers will take the hint. The address of the Secretary is, The Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. The Society is doing excellent work; it has a capable body of officials and deserves support.

## Gibbon and the Modern World

### II.—ANCIENT AND MODERN IDEOLOGY

WHERE a community lives in close contact with nature and with the very minimum of tool equipment, as in the case of primitive communities all the world over, its ideas and institutions will be as described in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*: that is, they will be based on the supposed magical control of the forces of nature by a priesthood credited with such powers and supported by the community for that purpose. The ancient official religions of the Mediterranean world were all of this nature. But by the period at which Gibbon opens his history such ideas had long ceased to carry conviction to the educated. Centuries of struggle between people and people, the enslavement of the conquered, and increased opportunities for travel consequent on the emergence of large empires, all served to discredit the primitive cults, and to give rise to philosophies of different tendency, or to new religions based

no longer on the magical control of mundane forces, but on the magical perpetuation of human life after death.

Of these various ideologies some naturally appealed more to the ruling and exploiting classes, others more to the disinherited. The philosophy of Plato, which denied the reality of matter and disparaged mechanical occupations, could not be expected to interest any but the leisured and studious. Only in such circles can such a doctrine as the non-existence of the everyday world of objects be taken seriously. The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, on the other hand, each had a wide appeal. Epicureanism is the nearest ancient equivalent of modern Freethought. It recognized the senses as the sole source of knowledge, matter as the sole reality, and happiness as the sole good. Its popularity is attested by direct evidence, and by the desperate misrepresentations to which its opponents were driven to counteract it. But it had no political message whatever. Stoicism, its rival, was equally Materialistic at the start, but had less of the scientific attitude, and allowed itself to use dangerously Theistic language. The main interests of the Stoics were practical and political. They were in advance of other philosophers in proclaiming cosmopolitanism and the brotherhood of man; and it was Stoic influence, not Christian, that effected the amelioration of the treatment of slaves under the Roman Empire. But in relation to the official religion they were trimmers, and in the end apologists, trying to allegorize and rationalize the primitive myths, much as many Christians do with their own myths to-day. The philosophy of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the Stoic emperor, did not prevent him from being a keen practitioner of the traditional ritual in its most superstitious aspects. After his death Stoicism petered out, a spent force.

The situation has its parallel to-day. Now, as then, a State religion continues to be supported by the ruling class for political reasons long after it has ceased to be believed by educated people, including most of its official supporters. Now, as then, progressive movements for one reason or another seem to have reached a blind alley. Epicureanism and Stoicism may, without straining analogy unduly, be compared respectively to the Freethought and Socialist movements in the modern world. Freethought shares with Epicureanism the merit of outspoken and uncompromising opposition to beliefs which have become incompatible with the scientific attitude. Social Democracy shares with Stoicism the merit of having challenged the iniquity of an established political and economic order, and of having, up to a certain point, successfully forced concessions from it. But the Freethought movement has tended increasingly to detach itself from political interests, while the official Socialist movement in its preoccupation with immediate political issues, has increasingly compromised with those religious institutions which it formerly attacked. Partly for this and partly for other reasons, all connected with the same root fault, Social Democracy to-day has become as respectable and as hopelessly bogged as Stoicism was under Marcus Aurelius.

Under the Roman Empire the slaves and other disinherited classes, to whom official religion had become meaningless, and whom philosophy could not reach or satisfy, sought in the world of dreams the wish-fulfilment denied to them in the world of reality. The importance of the "mystery" religions of antiquity was not fully appreciated in Gibbon's day; and his account of early Christianity suffers accordingly from what would now be deemed insufficient attention to its background. We now know that adaptations of primitive cults (above all those of Isis and Mithra), in which the interest had shifted from control of external forces to the quest of eternal life for the individual, had a great vogue throughout the Roman Empire; that in all



these cults the common feature was the worship of a saviour-god, the friend of mankind, through whose agency the devotee hoped to attain future bliss; and that these religions were the chief rivals contending with Christianity for the mastery of the Roman world.

Besides these there was the religion of the Jews, a conquered people, ground for centuries between the upper and nether millstones of opposing empires, and looking forward to a day when the tables would be turned on their oppressors. Though an insignificant fraction of the population numerically, the Jews made themselves a nuisance to the Roman authorities by their fanaticism, their extensive proselytising, and their repeated rebellions. In some way of which we do not know the details, the Messianic myth of the Jews coalesced with ideas popularized by the mystery religions, and took shape as Christianity, which soon outdistanced Judaism as a propagandist religion.

The imperial authorities saw in Christianity a more objectionable form of Judaism, dangerous in its appeal to slaves, outcasts, and uneducated people, and a menace to the Empire by its political tendencies, which, if not seditious, were certainly pacifist. How this religion, in the course of three centuries, became itself an instrument of government is a subject on which Gibbon's fifteenth and sixteenth chapters may still be read with pleasure and profit.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

(To be concluded)

## The Hind

The hind is the female hart or stag. Shakespeare's "Touchstone" viewed the beast as a very natural production—"If a hart do lack a hind," etc.

It was viewed otherwise by the ancients. Considered a clean beast it was deemed worthy of worship:—

A milk-white hind, immortal and unchanged.

(Dryden)

Goodliest of all the forest, hart and hind.

(Milton's "Paradise Lost")

As the symbol of religious ardour and aspiration it was made use of by the Psalmist—"As the hart panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

In the legends of the saints it played the part of guide, leading them to where holy relics were concealed.

To St. Eustace and St. Hubert it appeared with a luminous cross between its antlers. Under its influence they abandoned the chase and led lives of pious devotion.

The ten branches of its horns symbolize the ten commandments; and the ten fingers of the outstretched hands of the priest performing the miracle of transubstantiation.

Jacob, when blessing his sons, tell us that "Naphthali is a hind let loose. He giveth goodly words." The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, evidently!

Job asks: "Canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?" And the Psalmist tells us why we can't!—"the voice of the Lord maketh the hind to calve."

So the gestation of the hind, like that of Laon-tze, may last for 84 years, if the Lord pleases!

But when the hind does calve, in God's good time, he ought to see that it is done in time and place convenient and not under such distressing conditions as suggested by Jeremiah.

"The hind calved in the field and forsook it, because there was no grass."

GEORGE WALLACE

## The Religion of Abraham Lincoln

(By W. H. HERNDON, for twenty years Lincoln's law partner, and his most intimate friend.)

MR. LINCOLN moved to this city (Springfield, Ill.) in 1837, and here he became acquainted with various men of his own way of thinking. At that time they called themselves Freethinkers or free thinking men. I remember all these things distinctly, for I was with them, heard them, and was one of them. Mr. Lincoln here found other works—Hume, Gibbon, and others, and drank them in. He made no secret of his views, no concealment of his religion. He boldly avowed himself an infidel. When Mr. Lincoln was a candidate for our legislature he was accused of being an infidel, and of having said that Jesus Christ was an illegitimate child. He never denied his opinions nor flinched from his religious views; he was a true man, and yet it may be truthfully said that in 1837 his religion was low indeed. He made me once erase the name of God from a speech I was about to make in 1854, and he did this in Washington to one of his friends. I cannot now name the man nor the place he occupied in Washington; it will be known some time. I have the evidence and intend to keep it.

Mr. Lincoln ran for Congress against the Rev. Mr. Cartwright, in the year 1847 or 1848. In that contest he was accused of being an infidel, if not an Atheist; he never denied the charge—would not—"would die first"; in the first place because he knew it would and could be proved on him; and in the second place he was too true to his own convictions, to his own soul, to deny it. From what I know of Mr. Lincoln, and from what I have heard and verily believe, I can say, first, that he did not believe in a special creation, his side being that all creation was an evolution under law; secondly, he did not believe that the Bible was a special revelation from God, as the Christian world contends; thirdly, he did not believe in miracles, as understood by the Christian world; fourthly, he believed in universal inspiration and miracles under law; fifthly, he did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, as the Christian world contends; sixthly, he believed that all things, both matter and mind, were governed by laws, universal, absolute and eternal. All his speeches in Washington conclusively prove this. Law was to Lincoln everything—and special interferences, shams and delusions.

I do not remember ever seeing the words Jesus or Christ on print as uttered by Mr. Lincoln. If he used these words they can be found. He uses the word God but seldom. I never heard him use the name of Christ or Jesus but to confute the idea that he was the Christ, the only and truly begotten son of God, as the Christian world understands it. The idea that Mr. Lincoln carried the New Testament or Bible in his bosom or boots, to draw on opponents in debate, is ridiculous. If Christianity cannot live without falsehood, the sooner it dies the better for mankind. Every great man that dies—infidel, pantheist, theist or atheist—is instantly dragged into the folds of the Church, and transformed by falsehood into the great defender of the faith, unless his opinions are too well-known to allow it. Is Christianity in dread or fear? What is the matter with it? Is it sick and does it dread its doom?

(Published in the *Toledo Index* of April 2, 1870)

Profound ignorance makes a man dogmatic. He who knows nothing thinks that he can teach others what he just now has learnt himself; whilst he who knows a great deal, can scarce imagine any one cannot be acquainted with what he says, and speaks for this reason with more indifference.—*La Bruyere*.



## Books Worth While

*Science in Peace and War*, by Professor J. B. S. Haldane (Lawrence and Wishart, 5s.).

THIS book of Professor Haldane's is a sequel to his previous work, *Science and Everyday Life*. In his preface he says, "Two opposed views are held as to the function of science in war time. Some people say that war is so horrible and wicked that scientists should have nothing to do with it. Others say that in war time scientists should desert everything else to increase their country's fighting power. How, during a period of air-raids, anyone in Britain can avoid having something to do with the war, beats me. And as for increasing fighting power, you won't do that by neglecting the health either of the armed forces or the civil population. Does anyone suppose that a soldier will fight better because he knows his children are underfed?"

The truth is that we want to think scientifically about every factor in life—politics, philosophy, nutrition, housing and infection as well as about weapons.

Each chapter of this book is complete in itself, and in its 229 pages there is a range of subjects covered that makes the work almost a pocket library. Subjects as far apart as astronomy and phrenology are dealt with; organic chemistry and the opinions of Dean Inge; the thyroid gland and Does your gas mask leak?

There is a chapter dealing with industrial health and war and the effect of speeding up in factories and dangerous trades. From the factory we go to the Natural History Museum, where Professor Haldane has an opportunity of speaking on the work of Charles Darwin. Talking of Darwin, he says, "He was not the first person to suggest that existing animals were descended from simpler animals in the past. This was believed by the Roman materialistic poet and philosopher Lucretius, and probably by his Greek forerunner Epicurus. Professor Farrington of Swansea believes that their doctrines were part of a popular movement, and were stamped out in the name of religion, in this case the worship of Jupiter and other gods, by the Roman State."

If this is so, we see how history repeats itself in the determined but unavailing effort of the Church in the last century, to stamp out Darwinism. Professor Haldane aptly remarks: "Indeed evolution is a fairly obvious idea if you once realize that nothing lasts for ever." But Darwin was the first person to give an at all convincing account of what had happened and why it had happened. The author makes no secret of his admiration for Soviet Russia, and the work they have done in furthering scientific research. He criticizes freely many of the Soviet mistakes, but points out that no man in Russia has ever been fined for producing too big a crop of potatoes as was the case in England, in 1939.

He condemns our present system of medicine, and wants to see it socialized. He says: "You go to an individual doctor as your great great grandfather went to an individual weaver." Perhaps one of the most interesting chapters in the book is that dealing with human physiology, especially the part where he talks about the endocrines or ductless glands; and here he gives the reader some very valuable advice. He says that almost every advertisement for a gland preparation is a swindle.

Dean Inge occupies some four pages, chiefly criticisms of the Dean's articles, which have appeared in the *Evening Standard*. Professor Haldane remarks that he does not mind the Dean giving what he thinks are philosophical ideas, but when he tries to tread the paths of science, he is floundering about like a blind man on an unknown road. The Dean says he is prejudiced in favour of the old theory of recurrence. "So," Professor Haldane remarks, "so many thousand million years hence all events are to repeat themselves: another Inge will be born to win another scholarship at another Eton, to wear gaiters and write for another Lord Beaverbrook." He ends by saying that one can hardly expect Dean Inge

to know anything about science; such men as he have a very difficult function to perform—this, according to the author, is their work—"Their business is to lead people away from dangerous thoughts. By so doing they may possibly postpone the coming of Socialism for a few years. If so, they will ensure that the breakdown of Capitalism will find us unprepared, and that in consequence the transition of Socialism will be as difficult and bloody as possible."

The Author, is unlike many scientists who think that science is almost a priesthood in which the ordinary man is not interested and does not want to bother to become so. On the contrary he believes that a large section of us do want to know how and why things all around us happen and how many of them may be explained and understood.

The book is written in an easy pleasant style—there are some delightful little gems of humour, and the facts that cannot but impress the reader, are the Author's genuineness and his real love of humanity.

F. A. HORNIBROOK

## Correspondence

### THE BANNING OF NEWSPAPERS

#### TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I should like to be allowed to protest against the banning of *The Daily Worker* and *The Week* by the Government of the day. I write purely as a Freethinker, and not as a Communist or a regular reader of *The Daily Worker*. I am concerned in case the banning of periodicals which voice unpopular opinions should prove to be merely the forerunner of other measures against papers which have no intention of impeding the war effort, but are merely critical of the Government. Had Sir Samuel Hoare, when he was Home Secretary, sought repressive measures against our present Prime Minister (then out of office, and busily working to impede the Government of the day's appeasement policy) where should we have been to-day?

We are not, after all, at war with the Soviet Union, and if that Country—which has just concluded a deal with our neutral pal, America—*did* inspire the policy of *The Worker*, we know that it was not her but other States—Fascist Countries with whom we are now at war—who inspired the policy of pro-Fascist weeklies which still continue to flourish in our midst. I can think of three reviews (devoted almost entirely to Jew-baiting) which are helping to impede the war effort, and one news-sheet which has the continued support of the Franco supporters in our Country, for it is devoted entirely to sponsoring the cause of Fascist Spain.

I don't urge Mr. Morrison to shut down these publications, for I dislike muzzling any opinion with which I disagree; I merely submit to our Home Secretary that there appears to be a cast-iron case for banning the extreme "right" as well as the extreme "left." *The Week* has certainly been amazingly prophetic throughout the years, and if only for the sake of sweet consistency, the "True Blue" should go the same way as the "Dark Red." I address myself to our very "pale pink" Home Secretary. "Consistency"—yes, that was the word!

PETER NORTHCOTE

#### FROM DOWN UNDER

SIR,—Congratulations on surviving to September 15, 1940, with your paper *on time all the time!*

This speaks well for the "Pioneer Press," and upholds a good name.

If other newspapers were not cluttered up with religious propaganda they might be the same.

The *Daily Telegraph* (London) recently gave a Cardinal of the Italian International Fifth Column space in a restricted issue. Just what bearing this space had towards winning the war is left to conjecture.

Religion could be left over profitably for the period of



the war, and religious buildings turned over to war use. Just what ethics can there be in trying to delude one nation into a lot of rubbish. Editors know full well what they are doing, more especially those of foreign origin. An Australian father with four sons in the army, on reading in the Melbourne *Herald* of October 31, 1940, that the Pope was blessing Italian troops to kill his sons, said "My God if this is true they (evidently the Roman Catholic Church) don't get another darned penny of mine"; and you can imagine this man's feelings, and the amount of money he is likely to have given them already to acquire property in Australia for Rome. A Roman Catholic paper admitted to have over half a million from Victoria alone last year.

Have you ever heard the Mass counted out? Well this has occurred through the compulsory drumming of religion into the troops, early in the war. You are correct in directing attention to Roman Catholic influence in the Foreign Office, were it not for this this war would never have occurred. Can we not exercise that intelligence of placing education before religion, as seen amongst the 183,000,000 of inhabitants of Russia, all living at peace with one another?

The war tempo is steadily bearing down on us, and just what the Jesuits, who have been established in Japan for the past 400 years, are likely to bring into the situation is purely conjectural.

Your remarks on "freedom on the Radio" are all important; radio should serve war ends exclusively in war time.

Strong representations were made from Australia to the B.B.C. for you to be put on the Overseas programme, but as your voice has not yet come over, presumably you are taboo, which is a pity for the world's record holder for journalism. Even the Australian Associated Press, which has until recently battened down on the B.B.C. news service, makes no mention of your services to journalism. This is as from one journalist to another.

Maybe the B.P. will make a fuss of you when you are dead and hard to replace.

Well, cheer up old boy and the best of wishes for the New Year.

KORCA

Australia.

#### DETECTIVE STORIES IN WAR TIME

SIR,—According to the letter by Mr. G. H. Taylor, published in your issue of January 10, I was seriously at fault in suggesting that the popularity of detective fiction, consequent upon the war, is not altogether a bad thing. What I call escapism Mr. Taylor calls "dope," stating that it would have been better, in the years before the war, if the readers of detective stories had read what he rather vaguely calls "educative non-fiction."

So everything which is not "educative non-fiction" is dope! If so, then the reader of detective stories is in good company. Many people, in the years before the war and now, derive great enjoyment from fine poetry or beautiful music. "Escapism" again, I say, though no doubt Mr. Taylor would equally class the work of Shakespeare and Beethoven as merely dope. After all, neither Shakespeare nor Beethoven advanced the political well-being of the world by one iota; they were satisfied in that they developed an art destined to give enjoyment to many people; and the same thing in (of course) a far lesser degree applies to many novelists, including detective novelists.

After all, there may be much that is "paltry" (to use Mr. Taylor's word) in fiction; but "paltry" non-fiction is not unknown.

S.H.

SIR,—May I voice a protest to the letter headed "Detective Fiction and the War," by G. H. Taylor, in your January 199 issue. Mr. Taylor's commencing statement that people who predicted the decline of the detective novel over-estimated public intelligence, does not seem to be quite justified by the facts. The increase in the sale of fiction in recent years has been accompanied, as Mr. Taylor will doubtless admit, by a marked decrease in the sale of the Bible and its kindred literature. A few generations ago the average person, wishing to indulge in the escapism Mr. Taylor so heartily condemns, turned

to the Scriptures, and, finding such passages as "Behold I show you a mystery," left it at that and returned to reality without once endeavouring to reach a logical conclusion. But to-day even the dullest of minds seeks an unravelling of the mysteries set before it, and is not satisfied until a reasonable end has been attained. Consequently the detective novel has filled the place of the unfathomable mysteries of the Bible, and man is no longer content to wait till eternity for their solution. That is why I conclude that the detective novel made an unconscious, but important, step forward in the emancipation of the human mind.

As regards escapism, unless Mr. Taylor has cast aside all beauty in life as non-educative, has he never forgotten the present by concentrating on the loveliness of a country landscape, lost himself in the depths of a Beethoven symphony, taken himself back from the horrors of our modern world to the simple, and now almost enviable, village life expressed in such works of fiction as Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*, or replenished his imagination with the poetic fancies of a Shakespeare? What is art but an escape from the realities of life, and if a Christian education has denied that escapism from reaching higher than a detective novel, it is still far higher than the narrow, unsolvable spiritual mysteries of our grandfathers.

Mr. Taylor, in his sneer at "a mob of Hollywood fans and pub-crawlers," does not seem to have much knowledge of his subject. The cinema industry, like the non-fiction press, produces great masses of rubbish, but now and again a film to educate and inspire shines like a star out of the darkness, and has its due effect upon the "mob." I am thinking of such films as "The Good Earth," and "The Life of Emile Zola." If Mr. Taylor frequented public houses, he would find, not a drunken, ignorant crowd of mental degenerates, but an open-minded body of men, ready to discuss sanely any topic, religious, political, literary, past, present and future, in a way denied to them in any other form of social activity. No! Mr. Taylor, the main task is not to pull these people from their "dope." They are already free from the far more dangerous dope of the Churches. The main thing is to get at the mentally helpless who know no other means of escape than listening to the ravings of the survivors of pre-civilized days. When this has been attained, the detective novel and its like will pass away with the Churches.

E. J. HUGHES

#### Obituary

ELIZA HARRISON

THE remains of Eliza Harrison were cremated in the Mortlake Crematorium, on Friday, January 24. Death took place peacefully on January 20 in her 80th year. We sympathize sincerely with the husband, R. B. Harrison, who has been a constant reader of the *Freethinker*, and respected member of the N.S.S. for many years, also with other surviving members of the family in their loss. A Secular Service was conducted at the Crematorium by the General Secretary of the Society.—R.H.R.

#### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

##### LONDON

##### OUTDOOR

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

##### INDOOR

WEST LONDON BRANCH (At the house of Miss Woolston, 57 Warrington Crescent, W.9): at 2.30, February 9, F. A. Hornibrook will lecture on "The Moral Aspect of V.D." Nearest Tube Station, Warwick Avenue, also served by Nos. 6 and 16 buses.

##### COUNTRY

##### INDOOR

DARLINGTON (Labour Hall, Garden Street): 3.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Evolution v. Creation."  
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Bishop N. S. Talbot (Pretoria)—"The Bankruptcy of Humanism."



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