

# THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

VOL. LXI.—No. 7

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1941

PRICE THREEPENCE

## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>The Road to Salvation—The Editor</i> . . . . .	73
<i>"The Naughty 'Nineties"—Mimmermus</i> . . . . .	75
<i>Democracy—George Wallace</i> . . . . .	76
<i>The Case of Sir William Crookes—H. Cutner</i> . . . . .	80
<i>"The Altar"—M. S. Harbron</i> . . . . .	81

## Views and Opinions

### The Road to Salvation

The great difficulty before Christianity is that, having the only revelation from the only genuine God, and believing that the acceptance of this God and his badly worded revelation is the only way man can be saved in the next world, what is to happen to those who do not accept it? Concerning those who knew this revelation, but rejected it, the answer was simple, Go to hell. To those who had not heard of it, the answer was divided into those who said "Go to hell," and those who said they would go to a kind of midway between heaven and hell, and others who stood out for hell without the reduction of a single degree of temperature. The principal sign of salvation was baptism. But in that case, what became of those myriads of babies who have died without being baptized? The answer was again "Go to hell." And the hell to which for many centuries the Christian sent myriads of people of all ages and sex, was no place of picnic. Nor would it be correct to regard those who sent people to hell as altogether brutish in character. That the belief in hell made them more brutal than they otherwise would have been, and that the constant dwelling by preachers on this theme was an indication of a brutal nature, both are indisputable conclusions. But many preachers were quite ordinary in their feelings and sentiments. Thus, Jonathan Edwards was not a brutal man in either his ordinary thought or behaviour, but he could write this description of the place that God had prepared for those who would not worship him. He said that hell would be "a vast ocean of fire, in which the wicked shall be overwhelmed, which will always be in tempest, in which they shall be tost to and fro, having no rest night or day, vast waves or billows of fire continually rolling over their heads . . . their eyes, their tongues, their hands, their feet, their loins and their vitals shall forever be full of a glowing, melting fire, fierce enough to melt the very rocks and elements . . . and . . . they shall feel the torments, not for one minute, nor for one day, nor for one age or two ages, nor for ten thousand millions of ages, but for ever and ever without any end at all." Although some rather lax Christians were willing that unbaptized babies should go to a much milder hell, those whose religious sense was incorruptible held to the Jonathan Edwards, St. Tertullian, Spurgeon, Salvation Army and Roman Catholic type. Christianity is a religion of love. There really is nothing like it.

### The Meaning of Baptism

We dealt last week with the belief that salvation—whether of infant or adult—depended upon belief in

Jesus Christ, the outward sign of which was baptism. But baptism is a very primitive practice—part of that hotch-potch of primitive superstitions which go to make up the Christian religion. It was still in general use among different religious bodies in the pagan world, before the date given by the Church for the beginning of Christianity. And in the course of its history baptism has stood for at least four things. These are (1) purification for the benefit of others, (2) purification for the benefit of the individual who is baptized, (3) the initiation of one into the mysteries of cult, and (4) the adoption of a person as an incarnation of a god. We are only concerned now with the first two, but the miraculous character of all four is quite plain, and in all these cases water, because of its magical power, plays a part, although there is, with some, a substitute such as blood. The New Testament has it that "except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It will also be noted that Jesus Christ had to be baptized before his acceptance as an incarnate God. The Church of England service runs that "inasmuch as none can enter into the kingdom of God except . . . he be regenerate and born of water and the Holy Ghost . . . it is desirable that this child should be baptized." It is a case of pure magic, and we had the magic repeated in the coronation service of George VI. Baptism was present in most of the sects about the time given for the beginning of Christianity. Take the following description of the initiation into the mysteries of Mithraism. "Oh Lord having been born again I pass away, having been exalted I die. Coming again by life, begetting birth and freed unto death, I go the way thou hast ordered, as thou hast established and ordained the sacrament."

Only a modern Christian would deny the identity of these pre-Christian and Christian ceremonies. The early Christians would have found it absurdly impossible to do so. But they had an explanation for it. To quote that great man among the earlier generations of Christians, Justin Martyr, it was due to the devil imitating the Christianity that was to come. "Wherefore the evil demons in mimicry have handed down that the same thing shall be done in the mysteries of Mithras. For that bread and a cup of water are in these mysteries set before the initiate you either know or can learn." Impudence is not an uncommon feature with Christian apologists.

As I said last week the main purpose of primitive baptismal practice is the cleansing of the individual, whether it be a baby or an adult. The Christian replies, it is a cleansing from sin. Yes, that may be true of the later phases, but we are now concerned with the earliest form. It was to release the child from the inherited consequences of the sin of Adam. Certainly, but that too is a late stage. Really to understand the whole business one has to get back to beginnings, and it is not then difficult to recognize the old absurdity in its new dress. But to understand we must take another excursion.

\* \* \*

### The Discovery of Fatherhood

One of the fairly well established theories of modern anthropology is that while motherhood is always an admitted fact, fatherhood is actually a discovery made by later generations. The evidence for this statement, and it will be found in most up-to-date works

on the subject, is to be found in the works of Frazer and many others, and there is a couple of volumes on *Primitive Paternity*, by E. S. Hartland, dealing solely with the subject. The same author's *Legend of Perseus*, may also be consulted. But it would appear that originally all children are regarded by primitive peoples as an incarnation of a tribal spirit. The many semi-magical practices still in existence for ensuring the birth of a child may rank as a survival of this belief. But what we are concerned with here is the fact that the child and the mother being subjected to the supernatural or semi-supernatural influence of the tribal spirit makes both her and the child become "taboo." Christianity again illustrates its affinity with primitive beliefs in the fact that "sacred" things—buildings, relics, the sacred wafers, etc.—also carry with them this infectively dangerous influence, and may only be approached by men at the risk of danger to the non-sacred persons. Every one is acquainted with Christian legends—particularly when we are dealing with Roman Catholicism, which is a little nearer the savage than later cults—illustrating this. How, then, may the woman, who has given birth to a child, and the child itself, be made safe for man to again come into physical contact with them? Somehow the woman and the child must be "cleansed." Long ago, Tylor, in his indispensable *Primitive Culture*, pointed out the precautions taken with mother and child, and with girls at puberty, although the deeper significance of the practice was not then so well understood as it is to-day. Tylor says, "The purification of women at childbirth, etc., is ceremonially practised by the lower races. . . . The Basutos in South Africa . . . have a well-marked rite of lustration by sprinkling on girls at womanhood. The Hottentots considered mother and child unclean till they had been washed and smeared after the uncleanly native fashion. Lustrations with water were usual in West Africa . . . The Mantras of the Malay Peninsula have made the bathing of the mother after childbirth a ceremonial ordinance. It is so among the indigenes of India. . . . In the religion of Peru, lustration is well-marked. . . . In old Mexico . . . the nurse washed the infant in the name of the water-goddess to remove the impurity of birth."

There are hosts of similar practices that might be cited, and they all, in the light of what is now known of the real meaning of these practices, aimed at cleansing the woman and the child from an influence that is dangerous to man. In every case it is a ceremonial purity, not a sanitary one that is aimed at; and it is in the light of this understanding that one must read the New Testament practice of baptism, and the churching of women and the baptism of children in the Christian Church. We may follow Tylor with substantial agreement when he sums up by saying "The rites of lustration which have held and hold their places within the pale of Christianity are in well marked historical connexion with Jewish and Gentile ritual," and these, one may add, spring in unbroken succession from the lowest human cultures known to man. We have said often that the scientific interpretation of existing Christian ceremonies is not to be found in the explanations given them by scholarly Christians in heavy volumes, but in a knowledge of the beliefs and practices among existing tribes of primitive peoples. A modern man, if he came across for the first time the baptismal performance of the New Testament, or the baptismal ceremony which takes place in a modern Church or Chapel, would smile and recall, if he were well read, or had travelled enough, the practices that are common with savages all over the world.

We are never surprised when we are told that savages have welcomed Christian teaching. So far as what is given them is Christian, they have become such by the mere change of a name.

It may also be noted that baptism still remains a supernatural ceremony. It must be done in a sacred place, by a sacred person, and with a sanctified substance. Its use is, with a young person, to cleanse it, with a mother it is to cleanse her. In both cases it is not cleanliness—in its sanitary sense, that is intended. The whole purpose is to remove the contagion of the supernatural mana which hangs round a woman at her sexual crises. The idea that woman is "churched" merely to thank God for the safe delivery of her child, is simply untrue.

With Christianity there is another form of disguise that meets us in the case of baptism, but it is a disguise only, the real thing is there. The modern Christian explains that baptism is to wash away the inherited sin of Adam. He is ceremonially cleansed. With primitive mankind baptism is the process by which the baby is ceremonially cleansed from the dangerous "Mana" that hangs round the mother and the newly-born child. It is the same thing in substance. It remains a supernatural cleansing. Hovering over the baptismal font filled with holy water there is the spirit of the primitive savage finding refuge in the only form of building that is erected in his honour—a Church, a Chapel, a Synagogue, a Mosque or some other place that is made "sacred" for religious usage.

\* \* \*

#### Hell and its Consequences

We may now get back to our starting point, the burning question of whether unbaptized babies go to hell. Very logically, the vast majority of Christians at one time answered yes, and a majority still answer in the same way. It is true that they do not dilate on Hell as they once did. The times have changed, and the revolting nature of this particular teaching will no longer be received without protest. But Christian mothers will still hasten to get their children ceremonially purified, and one need only enquire amongst Christians to discover mothers who have lost a child before baptism, to find them still grievously wondering whether it has gone to hell or not. And it must not be forgotten that the most numerous body of Christians, Roman Catholics, are taught by their spiritual guides that unbaptized babies *will* go to hell, although the temperature will be lower than in the hell reserved for adult sinners. But the general Christian doctrine that man inherited the consequences of Adam's sin remains. And, theologically, the only justification for the legend of Jesus Christ.

I refer readers to my pamphlet *Giving 'em Hell*, for further information on a doctrine of which most present-day apologetic Christians fight shy, but it is there, essential to that Christian theology which developed its brutality and gloated over its ferocity as few other religious cults have done. Some of the greatest of Christian preachers have racked their imagination and exhausted their vocabulary in painting hell in the most vivid colours. How many people were driven mad by the ferocious sermons preached to them on the torments of hell it is impossible to say; that the number was very great there can be no doubt; that the fear of hell accentuated the weakness of minds that were already weak is beyond dispute.

Nor should it be forgotten that the preaching of hell in language that was vivid and picturesque was often due to the unrecognized brutality of the preachers themselves. Modern psychologists are well acquainted with the ease with which brutality may find gratification in the name of morality. Sadism has always been an active force in human nature, and it is seldom so forceful as when it finds gratification in the form of a religious and moral duty. But nothing can rob the Christian hell of its brutality and sadistic quality. Hell remains hell, however much it may be shrouded

(Continued on page 81)

## "The Naughty Nineties"

In libris felicitas.—Inscription on a Public Library.

A GENERATION ago there was a flowering period of English literature. A group of men, some young, and others not so young, richly deserve commemoration, for their work carried on a great literary tradition. Of this band of brothers-in-art several names stand out head and shoulders above the others and compel attention.

Oscar Wilde rightly belongs to this period, although his reputation was built up securely in the earlier decade. But at this time he put the finishing touches to a career which was already important by writing *De Profundis* and *A Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which are unique in their way. Rudyard Kipling was consolidating his hold on the reading public, and Robert Louis Stevenson was adding success to success and justifying his claim to rare genius.

But there were other very talented men. After the acknowledged masters there was a perfect nest of singing birds. Among these younger writers Ernest Dowson commands attention. He had genius, and his poetry is always personal in form and feeling. His songs have a pathos all their own. They sound like laments, in a low voice; by one who does not realize he is overheard. It is this pathetic unconsciousness which gives him so much of his charm, so limited, so exquisite within its limits. In his really fine poem, *Dregs*, the lines seem to have been written for the epitaph of a grave on which the earth was then but freshly stamped down:—

The fire is out, and spent the warmth thereof  
(This is the end of every song man sings!)  
The golden wine is drunk, the dregs remain,  
Bitter as wormwood and as salt as pain,  
And health and hope have gone the way of love  
Into the drear oblivion of lost things.

Quite simply and unaffectedly Dowson chants the old refrain of "All is vanity," and often sings of the unfulfilled desire. "The weary ways of men and one woman I shall forget"—that is the utmost of his hope; and it is, after all:—

The exquisite one crown  
Which crowns one day with all its calm  
The passionate and the weak.

Withal, he was an artist to his finger-tips. Such a line as

Our viols cease, our wine is death, our roses fail,  
in its contrast with:—

They are but come together for more loneliness

shows that his sense of verbal melody was precise and subtle. When everything is forgotten about Dowson except that he lived unhappily and died young, there remains a few exquisite poems which will always be sure of a place in the anthologies of the future.

These men did one very good thing. They rediscovered London for art. Arthur Symons wrote of Leicester Square; Dowson of the docks; Davidson made glorious poems of Fleet Street; Lawrence Bin-yon sang of white Saint Martin's and the gallery of St. Paul's; Crackanorpe sketched his London Vignettes; George Street talked wisely and well of the romance of Mayfair, and W. E. Henley nobly chanted his song of Trafalgar Square. Andrew Lang led the chorus:—

The yellow light of late July  
Shone golden down the dusty Strand.

It was a very notable poetic tendency which broke away as the influence of the accepted Victorian masters of melody had grown weaker, and from which the poetry of the future, however it may develop, must in turn take its start. Poems of life as it is must take

notice of the town as well as of the open road and the "wind on the heath."

It was a flowering time of the arts. Even the book illustrators caught the infection. Recall the bizarre talent of Aubrey Beardsley, whose black and white drawings were the envy and despair of his rivals, and whose exquisite decorative quality was only to be compared to the famous Japanese artists. Much of the work appeared in the celebrated *Yellow Book*. He also illustrated an edition of *The Rape of the Lock* and *Volpone*, the latter containing his best work. Another real genius was Phil May, whose sketches of real life added to the gaiety of the nation. Much of his finest work appeared in *Punch*, but he enlivened so many periodicals with his witty contributions. Recall his drawing of the stolid sentry and a lady asking for information at the Tower of London. "Which is the Bloody Tower, sentry?" asks the visitor, and the unexpected answer from the soldier, "All of it, mum." Another drawing entitled, "An Informal Introduction," depicted two coster couples, one of each side of a road, whilst one man jerks his thumb towards his fiancée and shouts, "Bill! this is her!"

Another bright and particular genius, S. H. Sime, had a more mordant wit, which he expended on the popular superstition. One of his drawings showed the stairway leading to the dock on the Day of Judgment. A crowd is waiting to go up, but a solitary figure is coming down clad in the nightshirt in which he died. "What's your sentence?" asks the front man in the crowd. The doomed one says: "Thirty thousand years boiling point Fahrenheit." Another drawing showed two ex-business men, clad in their night apparel, meeting in Hades. Says one to the other: "Fancy meeting you here. You built the tin tabernacle at the corner of our road!" A third drawing is just as laughable. Two "lost souls" in Hell engaged in conversation. "I feel quite at home already," says one, "this place reminds me so much of the old Underground Railway between King's Cross and Baker Street." The point of the joke is that in those far-off days steam-engines only were used on that railway, and the air was "sulphurous and tormenting." Sime, owing to his profanity, was "caviare to the general," but he managed to publish a lot of his drawings. His best work, however, was reserved for publication in portfolios, just as Gilray, Rowlandson and other caricaturists did at an earlier period. Talking of caricatures reminds me of a good story. A French Republican artist was hauled up before the Paris Law Court for depicting King Louis Phillipe with a head like a large pear. When asked what he had to say for himself, the artist spread his hands despairingly and said: "If Nature makes the King's head like a pear, what is an honest artist to do? Answer me that?"

All these men, artists and authors alike, pursued art for art's sake, and made the "'nineties" of the last century a very interesting period. Yeats rendered the poets befitting praise in his fine lines:—

You had to face your ends when young  
'Twas wine or women, or some curse  
But never made a poorer song  
That you might have a heavier purse.  
Nor gave loud service to a cause  
That you might have a troop of friends;  
You kept the Muses' sterner laws  
And unrepenting faced your ends.

MIMNERMUS

We like better to see those on whom we confer benefits,  
than those from whom we receive them.—*Rochefoucauld*.

A wise man knows his own ignorance; a fool thinks he knows everything.—*Anon*.

## Democracy

SERVANTS of a country, politicians and militarists, when very efficient, often become its dictators—its enemies.

Ruling this country, at present, at waging war against, an enemy they take for their slogan the word *Democracy*.

Numbers of them made laws, wage wars, and do many other questionable things. But goodness has nothing to do with numbers. It is not in any way democratic. "You may have," says Carlyle, "a Ben Nevis of parchment and Loch Lomonds of ink, but you cannot make an unjust thing just."

Everybody, at present, agrees that democracy is a very desirable thing. If it was thought by many of its advocates, who have hitherto opposed its advance, to be what most people think it, would it be so ardently protected?

Regardless of what they, and others think of democracy, however, is it a good thing? There seems to be much difference of opinion as to its meaning.

To many it means an era of equality. But equality generates uniformity—the triumph of mediocrity. Were we all capable of rising to higher levels this need not be so. But not being so, if equality can only be thus realized by a lowering of our highest standards, then equality is a thing to be avoided. Democracy too, might conceivably prove not only expensive, but a very coercive thing.

Creative force has always produced inequality, and multiplied differences—Beethoven, Shakespeare, George Stevenson, etc.—and any social advance, has been made through inequality.

The majority in this country has always been, and is now, composed of the ignorant, the poorest, the least capable of its citizens.

Civilization is in quality a moral thing. Let anyone doubting this, take the virtues from society, and see what is left.

To many, democracy is a new thing, viewed as a perfect, political panacea. There is no entirely new thing under the sun. Democracy "was no new thing, or special invention of the Athenian mind," says Morgan, "but an old and familiar system with an antiquity as great as the gentes themselves. Democratic ideas had existed in the knowledge and practice of their forefathers from time immemorial." (*Ancient Society*, p. 260.)

As a system it would not work in practice. One man of genius was enough to demonstrate its unworkableness: his reforms were accepted, but he had outraged the peoples' feeling of equality, therefore they killed him. Men of inventive genius, men who could always find the "necessary word," etc., all made their contribution to social advancement, were killed, and monuments erected to many of them.

And so with Communism; in the absence of cold storage, etc., people shared their luck in hunting, etc., having no means of selfishly preserving it, etc.

Now the killing and storing of these victims of Democracy, Communism, and all the other isms and 'ocracies, etc., all found to be equally unworkable, ceased just when minorities got strong enough to defend themselves. 'Isms and 'Ocracies multiplied after this became possible, and the many divisions of society made Aristocratic rule practicable. So the higher intelligence came to sway the lower.

Wherein I think misconception lurks, is in the view most of us take of politicians. Is a politician in reality a reformer? When Hamlet, playing with Yorick's skull says, "It might have been the pate of a politician—one who would circumvent Heaven," his remark was significant of much!

"The true rulers of men," says Mr. Frazer, are the thinkers who advance knowledge; for just as it is

through his superior knowledge, not through his superior strength, that man bears rule over the rest of the animal creation, so among men themselves it is knowledge which in the long run directs and controls the forces of Society. Thus the discoverers of new truths are the real though uncrowned and unseated kings of mankind; monarchs, statesmen, and law-givers are but their ministers, who sooner or later do their bidding by carrying out the idea of these master minds.

Politicians (Tory, Liberal, Socialist, etc.), then, may be said to be a class of people who keep an eye on the maturing thoughts of great men, to safeguard their own sectarian interests. While Journals like the *Freethinker* keep governing truths—new and old—continually in front of the people.

Many sections of society calling themselves democratic are in reality anything but that. Many minorities, some of them enlightened, some of them unenlightened, would be suppressed by these democratic people.

A democratic House of Commons could represent the majority and legislate for them, but we should need a Second Chamber (not like the present) of intellectuals, men whom the Democracy have not intelligence enough to select. Men whose function it would be to prevent the democratic house from wronging minorities, and also safeguarding the rights of the majority.

The creative force producing inequality and multiplying differences as of yore, making utopias and milleniums undesirable things! The consciousness of "something great" always out of reach, and the desire to "die advancing on," animating sensitive souls.

So with brave old Walt Whitman we take to the "Open Road," undismayed by the failure of past struggles, finding in questioning them an invigorating joy, and the sense of the need of an "active rebellion" on our onward march.

"Have the past struggles succeeded?  
"What has succeeded? Yourself? Your nation?  
Nature?"

"Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary."

GEORGE WALLACE

## DISESTABLISHMENT AND DISESTABLISHMENT

I had many provincial prejudices to get rid of after settling in England. It appeared at first the plainest duty in the world to unite with the dissenters in their agitation for the Separation of Church and State. After a year or so, I began to wonder at never seeing at their meetings any of the great liberal thinkers, none of the scientific men . . . I revised the whole matter carefully, and reached the conclusion that I had been cheated by the phrase, "Separation of Church and State." No genuine separation of that kind has ever taken place. In America, the separation of Church and State has invariably meant merely the separation of the State from one particular Church—the English Church—to the extent only of establishing all sects along with it. By the exemption of Church property from taxation the whole community is taxed in the interest of those churches. Then by the legal establishment of the aggregate Sabbatharianism of the churches, by appointing and paying national chaplains, by supporting in treaties and by military force the propaganda of missionaries, orthodox Christianity is made a national American institution. Sectarian churches are, indeed, all enjoying established privileges in America unknown to the English Church.

M. D. Conway, "Autobiography," Vol II., p. 291

## Acid Drops

There is an announcement that after the war (What will Colonel Bingham say?) there is to be made provision for more boys from Council Schools to go to "public schools." We hope the statement is justified, and also that the vacancies for "ordinary" boys will be adequate. Merely to take a few extra boys, at the cost of heavy State subsidies will simply not do. The offerings of our Colonel Bingham will still be there, and the inferiority and superiority complexes will not be destroyed. The number of boys admitted should be adequate to the population; and the conditions of entry should be precisely the same for all. That would have done with the scandal of public school boys being taught that they are destined to rule, a conviction that leads to our seeing in the higher public and political services men who are pitchforked from one post to another merely because they happen to belong to families that are able to "pull" the strings. A good drenching of the public schools with the best from the State schools will do good all round. We do not know whether Waterloo was won at Eton or not, but we do know that the Etons of this country are responsible for filling positions held by sheer incompetents, and for our—even during the present-times—having the same set of men moved from post to post after three or four months only in one position. The Britain of the future should be freed from these hereditary legislators; unless it can be seen to that these individuals win their way by their own merit. Intelligence does not of necessity run in families, but favouritism and promotion do. More than the education of boys is contained in this problem of the public schools.

The headmaster of Rugby, Mr. P. H. Lyons, says that Public Schools have welcomed every class in the land. But the admission of a few boys from the lower and middle class will not do. It is the atmosphere of the schools that needs altering. The atmosphere that the schools are to provide the future rulers in the Army and in the public service generally, even though a few boys outside the magic circle are admitted, must go. It is the notion of a ruling class, which made Colonel Bingham semi-consciously advertising the assumed rights of this class to have a monopoly of the higher public service, that must be killed if we are to justify the toll of blood which is now being shed to create—not preserve—a democracy in this country. So far as we know there is no disgrace in the United States in a boy entering a university and earning his living while he is there. Can we not reach that level, say, in return for the help America is giving us?

The Secretary of the Headmasters' Conference says that in the Conferences that are taking place between his organization and the heads of the Public schools, it is the question of the amount of Government control that is at issue. We expect that this is true; but why should the control of the public schools be decided on any principle other than that which obtains with other schools? It is the control that is a very important feature of the situation. That needs altering. And the question of expense should not arise. If we can spend ten millions a day on war, we ought not to jib, when the war is over, at spending a few millions a year on democratizing and uplifting our educational system? Poverty, even comparative poverty, should not stand in the way of the development of ability. That is the real wealth of a country, and we should make the most of it.

Here is a letter of the Secretary of the Headmasters' Conference, which has appeared in the press:—

Dear Sir Percival Sharp,—I am instructed by the Headmasters' Conference to forward to you a copy of a Resolution which was passed unanimously at their meeting on the 20th; copies are being sent to the Archbishop, the Cardinal, the Moderator of the Free Church Council, the Board of Education, and the Teachers' Association, including the N.U.T. The Resolution is as follows:—

"That this Conference, representing schools containing members of various denominations of Christianity,

expresses its strong conviction that the Christian Faith should be the basis and inspiration of their work, and while each member remains loyal to his own Church, they pledge themselves to promote that general object with all their power."

SPENCER LEESON

The kind of loyalty expressed by these headmasters, many of whom, we imagine, think more of their positions than of the welfare of the pupils under their care, is a fine example of the advantage that is being taken of the war. The Christian faith is to be made the basis of all their work. Whether parents believe in the "Christian Faith" or not does not matter. The State compels, rightly compels, children to attend school, and to these conscientious Christians, who are acting as pawns for the clergy, as Laval acts as a pawn for Hitler, the attendance of the children must be taken as an opportunity for providing clients for the churches. What kind of pupils will these headmasters turn out? A letter in another part of this issue partly answers the question.

The bigots of Braintree recently refused to sanction Sunday cinemas. One of the reasons given was that the people of Braintree did not want Sunday shows. Witham, an old Essex town, a few miles from Braintree, has recently decided on having Sunday Cinemas. This was opposed by the Churches, and amongst the reasons why Sunday cinemas should not be permitted in Witham was that the town would be inundated by people from Braintree—the ones who did not want them. Any lie appears to be good enough when the interests of Christian Churches is in question. No wonder that preachers impress upon us that the kind of truth they are fighting for is *Christian* truth. The ordinary variety of truth is of no use to the Churches. Neither is it to Hitler. He wants German truth; the Churches want Christian truth. Ordinary folk are content if they can just get truth.

The Archbishop of York has asked the B.B.C. to lift the ban off speakers who are known as Pacifists. We should have thought more of the Archbishop's protest if he had objected to broadcast himself while that ban remained. But why does not the Archbishop show his indignation in a practical manner? Why not invite one of these banned men to speak on pacifism in one of his churches? He might ask them to speak on the advice of Jesus that if a man smites you on the one cheek turn to him the other. And after all, the bigotry of the B.B.C. is not shown with regard to Pacifists only. It extends to other opinions. Why does not the Archbishop ask for freedom all round? That is the only freedom worth having.

*The Tablet* complains of the Germans that they have endowed Hitler with a measure of semi-deification. That is quite absurd, and we are entitled to say so. But is not *The Tablet* in the same position? After all it does go in for a form of deification, and the Roman Church, we should never forget, numbers more than half the Christian world, goes in for a wholesale semi-deification of those whom it raises to the level of saints, and whom these millions of Roman Catholics praise. Yet there is no such attack made on the Pope and his followers by *The Tablet*. Why is the semi-deification of Hitler a crime, and that of thousands of saints an example of religious development? The real fault of the Germans is that they are fundamentally too religious. Of course they differ from other religionists, but religionists always differ from one another, and some of them would not appear on the same platform with many of their brother religionists.

Here is another example of the peculiar mentality of Christians. *The Universe* complains that in Russia the Commissar for Public Instruction has issued instructions for the improvement of the anti-religious instruction in the schools. That, of course, makes the blood of the *Universe* curdle. But here in England the Roman Catholics are joining hands with their enemies, the Protestants, to force our Minister for Education to provide more religious teaching in the schools. And we wonder wherein lies the difference, in principle, between one Government teaching anti-religion, and a strong body of

religionists trying to compel another Government to teach *more* religion in schools! We have looked at the two cases upside down, downside up and crossways, and we are quite unable to detect any difference, in principle, between the two positions.

A correspondent informs us that the Government does not apply the luxury tax to rosaries, crucifixes, sacred statues, sacred oil, candles, and incense. The reason, or the excuse, given for these exemptions is that they are in great demand by the troops. We don't know whether it is now a criminal thing (publicly) to doubt the word of a Minister, but we mildly confess that the rush of the troops for sacred candles and incense and statues and crucifixes, is a situation that we can hardly picture. The war correspondents have forgotten to chronicle the fact. Even the prisoners in German hands do not send home for them, and so far as we know there is no public organization appealing for funds for the purpose of sending them to the front.

We see that a chaplain of the R.N.V.R. writes to a religious journal saying that "In common with the men I dislike compulsory attendance"—at Church service. "A dragooned congregation is an unwilling and a resentful one." Holding that opinion the Chaplain should set the example by asking the commanding officer not to order a Church parade. But that would be too risky, as the number of attendants would show that only a small minority wished to attend. So he concludes that "compulsory attendance has much to commend it. The Church becomes part of the regular routine, and every facility is provided for public worship." So the chaplain will go on drawing a good salary in the name of Christian self-denial and forcing men to attend Church in the name of freedom and democracy.

Cardinal Hinsley is anxious to see more crosses—Roman Catholic crosses—duly blessed by himself, distributed amongst Roman Catholic soldiers. They cost three-half-pence each, or 12s. 6d. for 50. The Cardinal wishes to get a hundred thousand distributed. We wish the Cardinal would explain how they act. Would they make a good substitute for gas-masks? Is the proportion of those killed who wear them smaller than those who have none of these magical crosses. If the Cardinal can "make magic" in this way, why cannot he do it for the whole of the army. Finally, if an ordinary man was caught selling magical buttons, or belts that would protect a soldier in war, how long would it be before he was in the hands of the police?

Just one further consideration. We do not doubt for a moment that some of the surviving soldiers (those who do not survive are not called to give evidence) will attribute their survival to the magic cross. But we undertake to bring others who will explain their missing a bullet by carrying a lucky wish-bone, or a rabbit's foot, or a number of things of like potency.

Father Young, the Anglo-Catholic priest of St. Thomas, Shepherd's Bush, is not very sanguine as to the future of the Church. In an interview with a reporter of the *Daily Mirror* he gave the usual talk of the failure of the Church and what the Church might become if it did what it hasn't done, never has done, and never will do. But the facts are all against him. He laughs at the notion that a Church that is filled is anything to go by. He says there are about five hundred come to his Church, but the parish numbers 15,000. People flock to Church after a bad bombing, but that is no indication of a return to religion. He complains that most of the clergy just preach morals, but he says, quite rightly, that this is not religion. But he is hopeful that if the Church becomes the leader of the people it will be a real force in life. We agree if the Church becomes the real leader of the people the people will follow the Church. That is a self-evident proposition. But it amounts to just nothing at all.

We should enjoy something like a referendum taken among soldiers with regard to their compulsory Church attendance. We feel certain that there would be a

seventy-five per cent vote against it. Not that this proportion of soldiers would be against a voluntary religious service, but it would represent antagonism to compulsion on a matter where freedom should exist. After all, if we are fighting for the freedom of the world, we might at least commence by giving to our armed forces freedom to stay away from Church if they do not wish to attend. Nothing is easier than to talk about freedom, nothing is harder than to *live* it—that is real freedom. When we were very young we remember hearing a drunken man bullying his wife as they walked along the street—she a few paces in front. Even in drink the husband was a champion of freedom. And what we heard was this—"Yer can go where yer like, do as yer like, and go with who yer like, but if I ketch yer gawd help yer." He too was a believer in freedom for all—provided people did as they were told.

Mr. C. E. M. Joad writes an article for the *Spectator*, and ends in the usual muddle when he is trying to solve an intellectual or a religious problem. His article is entitled *God and Evil*, and here is his conclusion:—

My impression is that in face of the new urgency of the fact of evil, the claims of dualism are once again making themselves felt. There is evil in the world not because God put it there, not even because man put it there, but because God shares the government of the world with a spirit of evil which is His antagonist. With it He struggles for the mastery of men's souls. This the hypothesis of the Zoroastrians and the Manichees, has in my experience during the last few months, cropped up in the most unexpected quarters.

So there we are, back again, in the earlier phases of the crudest of Christian beliefs, with a complete ignoring of what modern thought has to say about the nature of evil or the origin of the belief in Gods and devils. But to do the best of the earlier generations of Christian justice, they had at least some theory of how the devil came into existence. Mr. Joad hasn't even that. There is a God and there is a devil, and they are struggling for the souls of men, including that of Mr. Joad. These men might at least give the devil credit for good taste and a liking for intellectual company.

Religion still remains unbeatable as a subject for swindling people. In Los Angeles the eight leaders of a Christian sect called "I am," were charged with swindling its followers of about £750,000. One of the leaders called herself Joan of Arc, Jesus and St. Germaine. One of the persons charged had painted a picture of Jesus Christ, and said it was done at a sitting Jesus gave him. Others claimed that by vibrations they had disintegrated several airplanes on their way to attack America, and had also "disintegrated" three submarines that were about to attack the Panama Canal. The judge discharged three of the accused, and they could not agree concerning the others. Perhaps judge and jury were afraid of being disintegrated. Anyway, it is clear that swindling the public with sacred candles, holy relics, sacred springs, etc., is one of the simplest methods going. There is small chance of being "bowled out." And if one is exposed, there are many of the faithful that will still remain loyal.

The parsons have followed people into the subways, where they go to protect themselves from German bombs. It is a mean trick, for in this case the audience cannot run away, and so those who do not want to listen must do so, may even be kept from sleeping during the unasked for sermon. One parson, the Rev. B. Hessian, has at least enough natural decency to feel a little shame at preaching to people who do not wish to listen to him. Of course, he could refuse to go, but that would not pay, so the parson does his parsonic work and achieves the reputation of an ardent worker, and a good "pal." We should like to hear of some of these people in the shelter putting one or two searching questions to these "adventurous" clerics.

The National Bible Society reports that it has had the greatest demand for Bibles during the past twelve months than it has had for many years. It maybe that in consequence of the war with Japan there is a paper shortage in China.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

- J. CLOSE AND W. BUSHBY.—Thanks for orders; books and papers despatched.
- W. PILLINGS AND H. MCCOLL.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.
- J. HAMMOND.—Thanks for second subscription to our War Damage Fund. We note what you say, but we must bear in mind that many people have been hit very severely by the war. So far as we are concerned our chief difficulty has been the great rise in costs, down to and including such costs as providing a "Spotter" for the premises. Pleased to have your opinion that in these times "the value of a journal such as the *Freethinker* cannot be exaggerated."
- W. W. SMITH.—Thanks for interesting letter, and the names of two probable subscribers to the paper. There is, unquestionably, a concerted attempt on the part of the Churches, and a section of the press, to stage a "comeback" so far as Christianity is concerned. The more need for every *Freethinker* to do what he can to frustrate the move. Obligated for what you are doing.
- W. ROBERTS writes: "Thanks for your two new pamphlets on Atheism and Agnosticism. We second Mr. Cutner's opinion concerning them. They are the clearest and the most convincing statement of the case we have read. They should be circulated by the hundreds of thousands."
- Mr. FRANKLIN STEINER, the well-known American *Freethinker* and publicist, writes: "The *Freethinker* seems better than ever . . . I have ordered all your *Pamphlets for the People*. They are wonderful productions and should be circulated by the million." We have not the slightest objection to the last wish being realized; and we appreciate the opinion of one who is so well acquainted with *Freethought* literature.
- R. E. EDWARDS.—If you will read R. H. Barrow's *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, you will find that much of what is written concerning the slavery of ancient Rome by certain schools of modern economists is weakened by a wishful one-sided view, and that by Christian advocates is both exaggerated and largely untrue. Barrow's book was written in 1928. It is published by Methuen at 15s. One great distinction between ancient and modern slavery is that in both Rome and Greece it was much a question of loss of status. In modern times it was a question of difference of kind.
- H. JOHNSON (Durban).—Thanks for cuttings. We are pleased to see you so effectively busy with the press. Keep it up.
- 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. Roselli, 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.

## Sugar Plums

We find we are not liked by a Mr. T. F. Oxby, who has received from some one—not from us—a copy of the *Freethinker*. But as he thinks the B.B.C. 7.55 horror is quite admirable we are afraid that his judgment of good and bad is not very reliable. He also asks why we should assume he desired to read the *Freethinker*. We did not so assume. That would have paid a compliment to his intelligence which his letter demonstrates he in nowise desires. In fact, if we believed in a God, we would say that god intended him for a Christian. We feel sure he will die one.

There seems something wrong with this journal. An evidently aged Christian sends us a letter denouncing us and our work. He says the *Freethinker* is better now than it was fifty years ago, but he still doesn't want to read it. Merely noting that the paper must have created a vivid impression, for it to be still clear with our un-

## War Damage Fund

WE mentioned last week the suggestion that the War Damage Fund should be kept open for the "duration." We are not acting on it because we dislike long-standing appeals for financial help. It is the only part of our job that we find disagreeable. All the rest is an adventure, and an adventure without difficulties degenerates to clowning. And we think that within the next few weeks all will have had the opportunity to subscribe so far as the inclination to do so exists. We merely give others the chance of doing what they can towards doing what they ought.

So March 9 has been fixed for the closing date of this Fund.

Some of the contributors avow surprise that the response has not been greater than it is. I think they should bear in mind that the times are monstrously out of joint. Never before has the dislocation of family and social life been so marked, never in any other war have so many people had to face ruin—or what is next door to ruin. And we all ought to remember that the calls upon those who can give are many and various.

But there is no cause for alarm. Expenses are mounting in every direction—paper has now reached more than double the pre-war figure, and fresh expenses connected with the war occur week after week. But the *Freethinker* will see this war through as it saw the last one through. It has too many staunch friends for anything else to occur. That is the feature of the *Freethinker* of which I am most proud. I know of no other paper in this country which has established that feature of intimacy that exists between us and our readers. That is our greatest asset.

Previously received, £568 14s. 11d.; John Hayes, 10s.; J. Hammond (2nd donation), £2; W. C., 10s.; J. Henson, 2s.; Miss M. M. Hulsté, £5 5s.; J. G. Lupton (2nd donation), 10s.; G. Wilde, 2s. 6d.; G. H. Taylor, £1 1s.; A. S. Jones, 4s.; John Smith, £1; T. A. Roston, 10s.; "A New Reader," 5s.; A. Hook, 5s.; S. G. Leech, £2; H. Spence (2nd donation), £1; W. J. Bennett, 5s.; W. K. Hutton, 5s.; H. J. Hewer, 2s. 6d.; I. Burton, 8s.; Hugh Jones, 4s.; E. V. Crumpton, 5s. 8d.; A. W. Swarbrick, £1; J. Thompson, £1; H. Eden, 5s.; W. Ellison, 5s.; T. H. Pugh, £2. Total £529 19s. 7d.

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.

desirable correspondent, we go on to remark that according to all Christian calculations the *Freethinker* should be worse now than it was. But we are actually better. There is hope.

Our readers may recall that some weeks ago we called attention to a particularly impertinent Christian organization called the "Parents' Association," the main purpose of which seemed to be that of securing a good dose of religion to be given to all the children in State schools. We said we were surprised to find in the list of supporters the name of Sir Chalmers Mitchell. One of our readers was interested enough to make some enquiries, and it now turns out that Sir Chalmers Mitchell did join this association in response to an appeal by a colleague, but had no idea the Association was conducting a religious propaganda, a procedure that shows a great want of caution. He never attended any meetings or subscribed to the funds of the Society. He has now written to have his name removed from the Association's publications. We wonder how many of these Christian Societies obtain names in the same manner. The moral is that every statement made by a Christian organization engaged in propaganda work should be carefully verified. No wonder one great writer said that Christian

truth deserved to be classified with Punic faith. If all the lies told in this manner were carefully collected, what a large volume it would make.

Bridlington has decided to have Sunday Cinemas. Gloucester has also decided to tread the same path. And Bracknell (East Hampstead) has gone the same way. Pity the poor clergy! How can they hope to get people to Church if there are other ways of avoiding the deadly dullness of the Christian Sunday?

From the *Birmingham Post* for January 8:—

FIFTY YEARS AGO

From "*The Birmingham Post*," January 28, 1891

MR. BRADLAUGH

When fierce debate raged over the admission of Mr. Bradlaugh to the House of Commons, and when he was denied admission on religious grounds, when he was hustled out with violence and prosecuted in the courts of law with the virulence which can be displayed only by men labouring under warped and wrong-headed convictions, there were some of us who contended strongly that the House of Commons was acting in excess of its powers, and predicted that some day it would be ashamed of the unseemly passion, the prejudice and the lawlessness, and would expunge from its journals the records of those lamentable scenes. That came to pass yesterday. Ten years ago the House declared Mr. Bradlaugh incapable of sitting; after some years of conflict it allowed him to sit. Later it altered the law upon which his exclusion was erroneously based, and now, only one member dissenting, it has resolved that the record shall be expunged and that the disabling resolution shall be wiped out in form, as it has long been in fact. What would Mr. Newdegate, the great antagonist of Mr. Bradlaugh, have said had he been living now?

A passing thought! Was it because the churches wished their members not to break the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal" on Sunday, that Christians were ordered to close their places of business on that day?

## The Case of Sir William Crookes

### I.

Fifty years ago, the name of W. E. Gladstone was sacrosanct. It was almost always conjured up in a political discussion, but particularly in a religious one. What Mr. Gladstone said in 1868 became proverbial, and the unlucky sceptic of the claims of the Christian religion was nearly always met with a guffaw of contempt—how dare he pit his puny intelligence against a genius like Mr. Gladstone, who believed everything?

Mr. Gladstone's reputation in the two fields has, alas, suffered a somewhat drastic eclipse, with the passing of time; and there are few modern theologians who invoke his name or his work to bolster up a dying superstition. The *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* is hardly ever mentioned these days—except as a pious curiosity—in well-informed religious circles.

I cannot help thinking of the great Liberal statesman whenever our Spiritualist friends invoke the name of Sir William Crookes. It is with them just as sacrosanct as used to be the name of Mr. Gladstone with Liberals. Here he was, one of the world's great scientists, and he remained always a thorough believer in spirits, and in a spirit world, from which could be materialized—given, of course, a genuine medium like Florrie Cook—a beautiful feminine personality ready indeed to be loved and even kissed. How touchingly intriguing is that passage which the great scientist has himself written for us about the lovely being from another world—Katie King—whom that saintly medium, Florrie Cook, from a thoroughly attested cabinet, put into his arms:—

Katie never appeared of greater perfection, and for nearly two hours she walked about the room convers-

ing familiarly with those present. On several occasions she took my arm when walking, and the impression conveyed to my mind that it was a living woman by my side instead of a visitor from the other world. . . . I asked her permission to clasp her in my arms, so as to be able to verify the interesting observations . . . recently recorded. Permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did—well, as any gentleman would under the circumstances.

It can be vouched for that, on this particular occasion, the supernatural being was *not* the medium masquerading, and there are special reasons for making this remark.

Let me begin by pointing out that of all the people even a second or third rate conjuror can "deceive" the easiest, it is the average professor, whether of science, or economics, or even of music. A schoolboy is far more difficult to convince. When a professor is ready to "test" a medium, and proceeds to make the test "fool-proof," one can be almost quite certain that the medium will "put it over" with the greatest of ease. The idea that these scholars, fresh from their intensive reading and experiences in a scientific laboratory, would be able to detect the "illusions" of, say, men like Houdini, or Servais le Roy is simply fantastic. The average medium, producing physical phenomena, is far and away the superior in the art of "deceiving" of almost any man of science, and it can be confidently asserted that he rarely produces phenomena when the occasion is not favourable. D. D. Home was particularly careful in this way—which is why he has the reputation of never having been caught. Some readers will remember how he sat with Bradlaugh a number of times—and nothing happened. The "fluence" didn't work with such a powerful sceptic in the neighbourhood.

There is nothing in the personality of Sir William Crookes, of which we can read which shows that he could devise any precautions whatever against the possibility of fraud. On the contrary, on his own showing partly exemplified in the narration above, he seems to have been of a supremely trustful and loyal nature. Florrie Cook, with whom he sat at the "epoch-making" seances which are still talked about with hushed breath by reverent Spiritualists, was caught out again and again in sheer fraud; but never was Sir William's loyalty to her shaken. He *nearly* always said he had nothing to retract.

The evidence for the genuineness of these sittings is contained in three letters Sir William wrote to the *Spiritualist* in 1874, and later published by J. Burns under the title of *Researches in Spiritualism*. They are worth examining not only for themselves, but in the light of some of Sir William's later utterances.

In his first letter he claims that, in the house of a friend, Katie was standing in the room in front of him, while he heard behind a curtain Florrie "sobbing and moaning." There seems nothing here which proves that Sir William made it absolute certain that *only* Florrie could have entered the cabinet or gone behind the curtain. As Podmore says in his famous work, *Modern Spiritualism*, "The evidence, no doubt, left something to be desired, and in two later letters Mr. Crookes essayed to supply the deficiency." The next seance took place in his own house. "Katie, robed in white, came to the opening of the curtain, and summoned him to the assistance of her medium." Sir William found Florrie in a black dress "lying across the sofa. But Katie had vanished and he did not actually see the two forms together." Nor, continues Podmore, "did he apparently ever succeed in seeing the *faces* of Katie and Miss Cook simultaneously in his own house." But he claimed later to have seen their two forms together in a good light. Mark his own words however: "We did not on these occasions actually see the face of the medium, because of the shawl, but we saw her hands and feet." Can anything be more pathetically obvious that when the



two, Katie and Florrie, were together, all that was seen of Florrie was a bundle of clothes "with a shawl at one end, a pair of boots at the other, and something like hands attached to it"? Actually Katie always appeared barefooted.

Sir William took a number of photographs, and Podmore, who was lucky enough to see them, says that while Katie appeared to be different on different occasions "at many seances she strongly resembled the medium." In fact the likeness between Florrie and Katie was "unmistakable." This was so evident that Sir William declared that he must photograph them together, and thus prove once for all that Katie was not Florrie, nor Florrie, Katie.

So far the seances had taken place at Sir William's house, but directly his intentions were made clear as to photographing the two ladies together, Florrie declared she was quite willing *but at her own house!*

Why at her own house? Why not at Sir William's? Why did not the eminent scientist insist that Florrie should come, as always, *alone* to his house, and then the two figures could proceed from the cabinet together and be photographed, in this way silencing forever the unspeakable sceptic? Anyone except the all-believing Spiritualist knows why. At her own house it was the easiest thing in the world to produce Katie and Florrie at the same time. A dozen Katies could have been produced, and it is clear from Sir William's narrative, he would have believed in the lot.

The sequel is intensely interesting.

H. CUTNER

(Continued from page 74)

in an ethical and religious cover. I agree with a modern preacher, the Rev. Percy Dearmer:—

Hell in the language of theology and common speech alike, is not a condition that man makes for himself, but a place which God has prepared for him; neither is it a condition from which he can escape by repentance, but one from which there is no escape, since he is sent there for ever. People who believe in hell may reduce the number of its victims, they may lower by a few hundred degrees the temperature of its flames, or even, greatly venturing, may aver that the fire is spiritual, but they cannot make hell otherwise than a place or—at best—a condition of everlasting punishment. . . . All the detergents of the universe cannot disinfect that word. The whole conception is wicked, shocking, and monstrous.

If I had to draw up an indictment of the brutality, the positive immorality, the inescapable ethical and intellectual demoralization caused by the Christian religion, I could not find a more complete or a more convincing thesis than the Christian doctrine of hell. It did everything to brutalize the general population. Accompanied by the teaching of the Church that the rooting out of heresy by fire and sword was a premier religious duty, it made the general public accustomed to intolerance and brutality, and has borne its fruit in the Germany of to-day. It made life a nightmare for the most sensitive and a theatre of cruelty for others. The Church belittled this life and made the alleged after one a source of indescribable terror. It coarsened life to an almost unbelievable degree, for the only way in which the mass of the people could sustain themselves in the face of terror was to learn to ignore it. It is no wonder that century after century during the whole history of the Christian Churches there has been from preachers and laymen the continuous complaint of the number of people who neglected their religion and, until the situation became critical, either in general affairs or on a death-bed, paid scanty attention to the teaching of the Church. The teaching of the Church coarsened the most sensitive, and still further hardened the less susceptible. And it is worth noting that in all the crusades of those who sought to convert the people the

essential feature was not the good life here, but an escape from the torture of hell hereafter. From childhood to old age, from the dawn of life to its end, so long as the Church was supreme, so long this doctrine—still held, we must insist, by the majority of believers—hung like a dread shadow over the whole of existence.

To-day, thanks to the advertising power of the Christian Churches, we hear too little in public of the teaching upon which the Church really rests. It will not do. We must judge the Christian religion by its history, by what it was when it had the power to do, and by the doctrines that are still part of its official creed. Time has sapped the power of the churches. It has not yet achieved the more difficult task of compelling honesty of interpretation and speech.

CHAPMAN COHEN

## The Altar

PROLOGUE: THE THINKER

SCENE I.: ON MOYSLAUGHT PLAIN

SCENE II.: APOLLO'S GROVE

SCENE III.: THE CHAPEL OF "OUR LADY"

SCENE IV.: THE CROSS

EPILOGUE: THE THINKER

PROLOGUE: THE THINKER

I STAND, with conjectural mind (*in the midst of thought?*)  
Gazing, with questing eyes, into the mists of time,  
And deeply pondering on the nature of all things  
Symbolized in the Gods which men have called sublime.

These Gods of every age since first began the world,  
Created by man in the image of himself,  
Gods with man's passions, thoughts, feelings, and his  
form,  
Strange beings of lust and cruelty, desire and war.

I see through those mists of time an endless array  
Idols of stone and jade, of brass, and Gods of gold  
Things born of man's instinctive fear of Nature's way,  
From whom he sought his ends through sacrifice and  
blood.

Now Zeus steps down from heaven with thundery mien  
And Dionysius dances through Apollo's grove,  
Then Egypt's shadowed temples throne the God of Ra,  
The Sun, the golden splendour of eternal love.

The Lady Isis with the Horus on her knee  
Through Christianity now Mary, Virgin maid,  
And last the Jew of Nazarene, the "God of Light"  
Revealed by Tertullian as "Saviour of the World."

These are the Gods that man has worshipped through  
the years,

Bowed in tragic homage and blindly prayed in vain,  
Has suffered all, endured all, a martyr died,  
How pitiful the path of saints, their goal a dream.

See, then, I draw aside the misty veil of time  
And bring before thine eyes four visions from the past,  
The Scenery changes but the symbol is the same  
The altar stone of sacrifice, of tears and blood.

SCENE I.: ON MOYSLAUGHT PLAIN

THE sun is rising and the eastern sky  
Glows with a radiance as of fire,  
The shadows lift across the Moyslaught Plain,  
Quiet the echoes of the Druid choir.

Into the light the slow procession winds  
Towards the altar stained with endless blood  
Of children sacrificed to Crom Cruach  
The Golden God to whom they pray for food.

A child is lying on the altar stone  
Staring with anguish at the face above,  
And loudly now the priest with up-raised arm  
Cries to his God that "all is done in love."

How great the horror and the rising moans  
Of people praying in a frenzied cry  
"O God of Goodness, give us milk and corn  
Life for all in return for one to die."

SCENE II.: APOLLO'S GROVE

SHADOWED and cool the clearing in the trees,  
Out of the sun the grass grows lush and green,  
And purple-stained the ground where hyacinths  
Are bruised and trampled where the deer have been.

Raised to the sun Apollo's altar stands  
Pale marble gleaming through the dappled shade,  
The air is scented from the flowered wreaths  
Each flower a prayer as sacrifice is made.

Sweet, glowing fruits are piled upon the stone,  
And, if the offering is given in vain  
Flushed with the sun's warm kiss a kneeling maid  
Pleads with Apollo for the love of man.

But when the trees are dark against the blue  
And shadowed night falls softly through the glade,  
And from the sky the young pale slip of moon,  
Kisses the altar with her silver blade.

There is movement through the trampled grasses,  
Whispers in the silence . . . a stifled moan,  
Then the shadows thicken in the clearing  
And darkening blood is dripping down the stone.

SCENE III.: THE CHAPEL OF "OUR LADY"

BLUE and gold, with stars around her head  
"Our Lady" stands in silence and alone,  
Gazing with lifeless eyes at all who kneel before  
In tragic reverence to a thing of stone.

Dim, shadowed figures bow their weary heads,  
Forms wracked with agony, with sweat and Tears,  
Pleading for hope, for mercy from "The Maid"  
Symbol of myths through all the distant years.

Katherine of Aragon is here, so proud and worn,  
And Mary, praying for a longed-for child,  
The Bloody Queen, whose Catholic eyes are cold  
And see around the stake the faggots piled.

Before "Our Lady" kneels the Scottish Queen,  
Mary the Beautiful, the pale, the sad  
Offers her wistful heart in murmurous prayer,  
Pleads for the mercy that she never had.

And in the shadows round the dim-lit walls  
Steal gibbering wraiths with wandering, maddened  
eyes,  
Tortured upon the Inquisition's rack,  
Victims of the God they idealise.

SCENE IV.: THE CROSS

HERE is the symbol of man's agony and tears  
Set above the Altar, the sacrificial stone,  
Jesus the Nazarene hangs on this bloody cross  
Who for man's worldly "sins" did once atone.

Madman or myth, this is the guide of man,  
This is the "One" they worship with their soul,  
If they have "sinned" and do not yet repent  
The flames of hell are burning as their goal.

And so man bears his cross of ignorance  
And faith in just another tribal God,  
And may not live his individual life  
But makes the sacrifice of "freedom's blood."

EPILOGUE: THE THINKER

THE mists close in again about the ages past  
These scenes from long-dead years fade from the vision's  
eye,

But still the motive stays, the sacrifice for gain  
And prayers before the altar to a man-made God.

Judge, then, all ye who gaze into the distant past,  
Judge with a clear, unbalanced mind the service done,

The individual gain from worship of the Gods,  
What have humanity's beliefs won for the world?

And can't thou draw aside the veil from future years  
And clearly thus reveal the minds of men to come  
Will the gleam of Truth shine through the obscuring  
mists

And lead the darkened earth to sanity and light?

M. S. HARRISON

Correspondence

A FEW QUERIES

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I really must start this letter, which I fear will prove a trifle lengthy, by saying that seldom have I read a more interesting and what it is more important, instructive book, than your *Almost an Autobiography*. It is a book which I shall read again and again before I "shuffle off this mortal coil." In case this should sound rather fulsome, allow me to inform you that it is a heart-felt appreciation. Now for a few things that I want to ask you for enlightenment on—also maybe a criticism or two.

*Religion and Morality.* In one of your numbers, not so very long ago, your leading article dealt very fully with this very interesting matter, but unfortunately I have either mis-laid the article which I think I cut out or what is more likely I gave the number away without cutting it out. Could you inform me when it appeared?

*Affirmation.* I regret to say that I am a bit uncertain as to the actual facts in connexion with the right of a witness in a court of law to "affirm" rather than take an oath on the Bible. I unfortunately found myself in an argument over this question a few days ago, with a man who first of all informed me that no such right existed (a crass absurdity, of course) and who furthermore followed up that absurd statement by another, in which he solemnly told me that "he ought to know" (which statement, as you are aware, is intended to convey the impression that he does know). Please what are the facts, and could you introduce me to any literature dealing with it.

In this connexion I must say that I strongly disagree with the suggestion made by you on page 236 of your book that the great Thomas Huxley was in any way pusillanimous when discussing this attitude towards religion. "Pusillanimous" is not the word you use by the way. In his essays, which I have by me, "Doubting Thomas" deals with the matter in a very forthright manner. However, I am sure that your two essays will enable me to make up my mind once and for all.

*The legal right to speak in any public place.* This, you will be very relieved to find, is my last question.

I was particularly interested in a sentence which appears at the top of page 251 of your book. "It should be stated that no one has a legal right to speak in any public place." On most Sunday evenings I listen to the "spouters" on the Downs in my City of Bristol, and it frequently happens that when a gentleman is asked a question which has him, temporarily at least, floored, he answers by telling his questioner (not infrequently myself) not to interrupt the meeting and sometimes he adds some vague statement to the effect that he is where he is by virtue of having had that particular space of my downs allocated to him BY THE POLICE. The latter part is, of course, extremely silly since the police have no right to grant anything—they are employed to see that existing laws are carried out and no more. But I must confess that I really thought one had a right to get up and "spout" in a public place. One merely does so on sufferance I take it. Could you give once again the facts, as I do want to be clear on this point. I hate vagueness.

*An Incident.* My very delightful and historical City of Bristol, as you are doubtless aware, is full of churches, public houses and religious people. I very much regret to have to inform you that I am not one of the last mentioned—I am only moral, or perhaps I should say "fairly moral," i.e., I pay my tailor, grocer and other gents with whom I have business dealings their money as and when it is due.

I happened to be in one of the second mentioned a few days ago taking a little beer, when the man behind the

bar, noticing me reading the *Freethinker*, asked me how long I had read it. "Thirty years, more or less," I replied. "I used to," he replied, only my "Missus" objected—so I sometimes pass him my copy when his "Missus" isn't looking. He told me that he heard you once (I calculated that it must have been between 1928 and 1930) as he was a bit uncertain, taking part in a debate at Neath with a Rev. William Jones. Do you remember this?

*Final.* I fully appreciate that a busy man like yourself will not have time to answer this letter personally—just a reference in your current number will be sufficient, only I am a great one for "knowing" what I am talking about and not "thinking." C. N. VICK

[This letter is rather lengthy, but we publish it because it will, we feel, be of general interest. First, with regard to the affirmation. By the Oaths Amendment Act of 1888, any one is entitled to affirm in any and every case where an oath is usually necessary. There is no question of privilege here, it is the legal right of every citizen. Your newsagent could get you a copy of the Act for a few pence.

*Huxley.*—We must refer Mr. Vick to the chapter dealing with Agnosticism in our *Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought*. We have too much respect for Huxley's intellect not to believe that his invention of the word "Agnosticism" was due to his wishing to evade the unpopularity of "Atheism." That he was naturally a fighter, a man with a clear intellect and a fine power of exposition only strengthens the belief. There are other things that may support this. His support of the Bible in the schools on a critical occasion, for example.

The article on "Religion and Morality," which we think you refer to, was in the *Freethinker* for October 27, 1940.

With regard to speaking in a public thoroughfare—No one has a legal right to speak in a public thoroughfare. On the other hand, no one has a right to interfere with anyone doing so unless he is causing an obstruction, using obscene language, or acting or creating a nuisance, or speaking so as to incite a breach of the peace. The onus of proof lies with the police or with those who bring the charge of doing any of these things. This usually is the police. The police always have control over the streets.—C.C.]

#### RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

*SIR.*—On the subject of religion in schools, I had occasion recently to ask of a teacher delegate to a Trades and Labour Council Meeting, if a child who was withdrawn from religious instruction in the schools was penalized in any way. He said "No." Upon being pressed for further information he said that a child who was withdrawn from religious instruction would not be expected to attend school until after the religious lesson, whereupon the child would receive a late mark. I asked him if he considered this to be unfair to the child, as it followed that the child would thus gain a reputation for unpunctuality that might in later years disqualify him for a job. He replied that that would be the fault of his parents for not allowing him to receive religious instruction! I then asked him if the child could be sent at the usual time and an alternative subject be set, so as to overcome the difficulty of the late mark. He replied that if a sufficient number of children were withdrawn to form a class it may be done, and then added in a warning tone that the authorities wouldn't approve of it! Who said the Freethinkers were flogging a dead horse?

In conclusion, it may interest you to know that I introduced the *Freethinker* to a Unitarian friend of mine, who, after reading two or three copies, told me he intends taking it each week. He was evidently one of those who was just around the corner H. DRAKE

#### RENAN

*SIR.*—Mimmermus's tribute to Renan is timely. It has long been the fashion with many Freethinkers to treat Renan as little better than an apologist, on account of his acceptance of a historical Jesus. Certainly no one to-day would regard the *Vie de Jésus* as up-to-date history. Renan's enduring contribution to the history of religion is to be found in the later volumes of his *Origines du Christianisme*, especially *Les Evangiles*, *L'Eglise Chrétienne*, and *Marc-Aurèle*. As a readable yet scholarly account of early Church history they are bad to beat.

Renan has only one fault. With all his intellectual honesty, he never quite sheds a sentimental attachment

to the Catholicism of his youth. Towards the end of *Marc-Aurèle*, Renan sums up the "programme of all free minds" in his own day in terms of a Christianity recognized as "the religion of civilized nations," but interpreted by educated people in a non-miraculous sense. "The Freethinker," he says, "who does without it altogether, is within his rights; but the Freethinker's case is a special one, deserving of high respect. The Freethinker's position, intellectually and morally, could never become that of a nation or of mankind generally." Or, as Dr. Inge has put it, one religion for the philosopher and another for the housemaid! If that had been the ideal of Freethinkers, there would have been no Freethought movement. Renan's qualities must not blind us to his defects, nor *vice versa*.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

#### DETECTIVE FICTION AND THE WAR

*SIR.*—The issue raised by S. H. in his article on December 15 was Detective Fiction and the War, not Beautiful Music and the War, not Fine Poetry and the War, nor Lovely Landscapes, nor Beethoven, nor Educational Films, but Detective Fiction, so let my critics keep to the point, if it is not too painful for them.

My case was that a public which, instead of wallowing in murder mysteries, had concerned itself with even quite simple expositions like Helen Kirkpatrick's *This Terrible Peace*, E. O. Lorimer's, *What Hitler Wants*, Douglas Reed's *Insanity Fair*, etc., would have made its voice heard and acted as a brake on the disastrous policy carried out by the "men of Munich." What did it matter if the freedom of the Czechs were thrown away so long as there were football pools to enter, murders and "westerns" to read, and a game of darts at the pub as an outlet for sadism? Dear old Neville would put things right in the outer world, while we curled up in an armchair with our favourite dope.

"So everything which is not educative non-fiction is dope!" exclaims S.H. triumphantly, as though that were a valid conclusion from my remarks. I cannot prevent him talking foolishly; I can only recommend some elementary logic. To help him, there are the things I did not say: (1) That all fiction is poison (perhaps only 99 per cent); (2) That all non-fiction is educative.

I learn from the other correspondent, Mr. S. J. Hughes, that the murder-thrill fiends of to-day have been recruited from the Bible fiends of the past, and I can well believe it.

But I am not aware that the mental training afforded by reading westerns and thrillers has resulted in any great movement towards the intelligent rejection of religion. He also says that public houses are full of men ready to discuss "any topic, religion, political, literary, etc." I know the type; a bit about everything and scarcely anything of value about anything. Mr. Hughes is confusing discussion with mere talk.

As (amateur) librarian for a district of 8,000 I have some opportunity for studying public taste in literature. It is most enlightening, and if my critics still think Shakespeare and fine poetry come into this controversy, I can prepare some devastating figures for them.

Finally, I am not "sneering" at anybody. I am criticizing a social phenomenon. G. H. TAYLOR

#### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

##### LONDON

##### OUTDOOR

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

##### INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1): 11.0, M. Channing-Pearce, M.A.—"Religion and Catastrophe."

##### COUNTRY

##### INDOOR

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (47 Thurnscoe Road, two doors below the Rink): 7.0, Mr. Broadley—"The Future of Freethought."

DARLINGTON (Labour Hall, Garden Street): 3.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"More about Moses and Darwin."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Mr. Bernard Millett—"The War and the Jewish Question."

# BOOKS WORTH READING

## BOOKS BY CHAPMAN COHEN

**A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT.** A Statement of the Case for Freethought, including a Criticism of Fundamental Religious Doctrines. Cloth Bound, 3s. 6d., postage 3¼d.

**BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL.** Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.

**DETERMINISM OR FREE-WILL?** An Exposition of the Subject in the Light of the Doctrines of Evolution. Second Edition. Half-Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 2¼d.

**ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING.** First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Series. Five Vols., post free 12s. 6d., each volume 2s. 6d., postage 2¼d.

**FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION.** A Lecture delivered at Manchester College, Oxford, with Appendix of Illustrative Material. Paper, 9d., postage 1d.

**FOUR LECTURES ON FREETHOUGHT AND LIFE.** Price, 1s., postage 1¼d.

**CHRISTIANITY, SLAVERY AND LABOUR.** Fourth Edition. Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

**GOD AND THE UNIVERSE.** With a Reply by Prof. A. S. Eddington. Cloth, 3s., postage 3d.; paper, 2s., postage 2d.

**LETTERS TO THE LORD.** Cloth, 2s., postage 2d.; paper, 1s., postage 2d.

**LETTERS TO A COUNTRY VICAR.** Containing eight letters in reply to questions from a South Country Vicar. Cloth, 2s., postage 2d.; paper, 1s., postage 1¼d.

### G. W. FOOTE

**BIBLE ROMANCES.** 2s. 6d., postage 3d.

**SHAKESPEARE & OTHER LITERARY ESSAYS.** Cloth, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

**THE BIBLE HANDBOOK.** For Freethinkers and Inquiring Christians. (With W. P. BALL). Seventh Edition 2s. 6d., postage 2¼d.

**THE JEWISH LIFE OF CHRIST.** Translated from the Hebrew. Preface by G. W. Foote. 6d., postage ½d.

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF SECULARISM.** 2d., postage ½d.

**WILL CHRIST SAVE US?** 2d., postage ¼d.

### G. W. FOOTE and A. D. McLAREN

**INFIDEL DEATH-BEDS.** Cloth, 2s., postage 3d.

### F. A. HORNIBROOK

**SOME CHRISTIAN TYPES.** 4d., postage 1d.

**WITHOUT RESERVE.** 2s. 6d., postage 4¼d.

### Col. R. G. INGERSOLL

**ABOUT THE HOLY BIBLE.** 3d., postage 1d.

**MISTAKES OF MOSES.** 2d., postage ¼d.

**ORATION ON THOMAS PAINE.** 2d., postage ½d.

**ROME OR REASON? A Reply to Cardinal Manning.** 3d., postage 1d.

**THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.** 2d., postage ¼d.

**THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.** 1d., postage ¼d.

**THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH.** 1d., postage ½d.

**WHAT IS RELIGION?** Contains Col. Ingersoll's Confession of Faith. 1d., postage ¼d.

**WHAT IS IT WORTH.** A Study of the Bible. 1d., postage ¼d.

**MATERIALISM RE-STATED.** Contains chapters on : A Question of Prejudice—Some Critics of Materialism—Materialism in History—What is Materialism?—Science and Pseudo-Science—The March of Materialism—On Cause and Effect—The Problem of Personality. Cloth, 3s. 6d., postage 2¼d.

**OPINIONS : RANDOM REFLECTIONS AND WAY-SIDE SAYINGS.** With Portrait of Author. Calf, 5s.; Cloth Gilt, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

**PAGAN SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT.** Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

**RELIGION AND SEX.** Studies in the Pathology of Religious Development. 6s., postage 6d.

**SELECTED HERESIES.** Cloth Gilt, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

**THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH.** A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Future Life, with a Study of Spiritualism from the Standpoint of the New Psychology. Cloth Bound, 2s. 6d., postage 2¼d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

**THEISM OR ATHEISM? The Great Alternative.** An Exhaustive Examination of the Evidences on Behalf of Theism, with a Statement of the Case for Atheism. Bound in full Cloth, Gilt Lettered, 3s. 6d., postage 2¼d.

**WOMAN AND CHRISTIANITY.** The story of the Exploitation of a Sex. 1s., postage 1d.

### W. MANN

**MODERN MATERIALISM.** A Candid Examination. Paper, 1s. 6d., postage 1¼d.

**THE RELIGION OF FAMOUS MEN.** 1d., postage ¼d.

### THOMAS PAINE

**THE AGE OF REASON.** Complete edition, 202 pp., with a 44-p. introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d., postage 2¼d. Or strongly bound in cloth with portrait, 1s. 6d., postage 3d.

### PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

By CHAPMAN COHEN

Morality Without God

What is the Use of Prayer?

Christianity and Woman

Must We Have a Religion?

The Devil

What is Freethought?

Gods and Their Makers

Giving 'em Hell

The Church's Fight for the Child

Deity and Design

What is the Use of a Future Life?

Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live

Freethought and the Child

One penny each

Recent Additions

AGNOSTICISM OR? . . .

ATHEISM

Threshalfpence each

Postage One penny

## Almost An Autobiography

CHAPMAN COHEN

*Fifty Years of Freethought Advocacy. A Unique Record*

5 plates. Cloth gilt

Price 6s.

Postage 5d.

## THE MIRACLES OF ST. MARTIN

BY

C. CLAYTON DOYE

Price post free

7d.