

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions

### Evidence and Belief

ONE of the strangest of delusions, carefully cultivated, is that mankind has always been in search of a God. It would be nearer the truth to say that man has always been engaged in either dodging or getting rid of gods. It would be the exact truth to say that man has made gods by regiments and slain them by battalions. The curious thing is that those who tell us that man can find no peace until he has discovered God, also inform us that the evils of to-day are due to the fact that man has forgotten God. Really, when a man spends a large part of his life in finding something, he does not easily lose it, unless he discovers that when found it is of little or no use to him. And up to the present no one has been able to show that a man who has not found God, or who lost him again, is any worse off than the man who has found God, holds on to him, and behaves as though he is in constant fear that someone will take God away from him. And, once found, God has to be guarded from assault in every possible way. There must be, when possible, laws to protect him against assault, he must be forced upon children because every one of God's agents is fearful of their chief running against the god-less adult. Thousands of thousands of paid advertisers are continually telling the world that they must have God, and year by year there goes on a decrease of those who believe in him.

After all man owes, even in the Bible, little of civilization to his gods. God made man naked, and he had to provide himself with clothing. He left him ignorant and he had to risk damnation to find out good and evil. Where God left a swamp human ingenuity had to make it suitable for habitation. God left the world plastered over with disease germs, and man was left to discover how to protect himself against them. Civilization is a human product, not a heavenly one. When a parishioner was proudly showing his vicar that he was growing beautiful flowers where was formerly useless land, the Vicar remarked, "Well, you must thank God for the land, at any rate." "Maybe," replied the man, "but you should have seen the state of it when I took it in hand."

### Our Primitives

It is not unimportant to remember that mankind did not begin to believe in gods without having what was considered satisfying evidence that they existed. The evidence was not of the kind that would satisfy the modern mind, but it was there, and its nature and quality is well known to those who will take the trouble to consider it. All the evidence there was, or is, for the existence of gods is with us, but it would no

more satisfy a civilized man to-day than would an old village legend prove the truth of old women flying through the air on broomsticks. Neither was the evidence of the kind that is carefully collected and deductions then made with care. But belief of any kind is impossible without there being something in the nature of evidence. The evidence of which a belief is the expression may be of the kind that we consciously arrange in logical order; it may be based on little better than prejudice, but belief must be based upon what is accepted as facts of experience. Even the beliefs of a dipsomaniac rests on what are to him factual experiences.

It is sometimes argued that the belief in gods is universal. That may be admitted, but with qualifications. For the fully-fledged God represents a secondary stage of man's development; there is an earlier stage from which the idea of god is precipitated. There is evidence that there are tribes of men without the belief in gods, but there is not known any body of people who are without the raw material from which the gods come. Years ago there existed a controversy as to whether man was originally an Atheist or a Theist. The discussion was futile; at most it was a war of words, and answered to no relevant facts. Freud called the belief in God the history of an illusion, but illusions have their own class of facts from which they emerge. The belief in gods is one of the greatest illusions of man, but illusions have an origin, a history and a development. To the genuinely scientific investigator illusions deserve as careful a study as repetitive facts. When a man says, I am not concerned with your illusions but only with your facts he is advertising his unfitness as an investigator. For "facts" cover the whole world of human experience. It is the relevance of given "facts" to tested experience that is of importance. The visions of a man with a mind deranged are as important to a physician as are the reactions of a man in perfect bodily and mental health. Everything depends upon the nature of the facts.

### Gods

There is to-day no mystery concerning the nature of the "facts" on which the belief in gods is based. God-making is not to be placed along with things the secret of producing which is unknown. God-making is still going on among primitive peoples, and an examination of the primitives in our midst will often bring us near to the mental conditions to which the gods owe their being. The whole process from the making of a god, to the death of a god, and the establishment of a philosophic Atheism can now be studied as biologists study the evolution of a special animal form. As I have so often said, the question of whether God exists is scientifically out of date. Merely to set the question is to ignore completely the whole trend of modern anthropology. The real question of to-day is not "Does God exist?"—that is a position taken up by the B.B.C. primitives and parsons. The scientific question is, "What precisely were the conditions under which the gods came into existence, what are the conditions of their perpetuation, and what are the causes of their decay and disappearance?"

From the modern point of view our primitive ancestors were wrong in the conclusions they drew from certain experiences, but given the facts as they saw

them the conclusions reached were logical enough. They lived in a world in which the gods ran riot—semi-gods and full-fledged ones were all around. They were responsible for all that happened. Of course man did not need to have advanced very far from the animal world to recognize that some effort of his own was necessary to get food, to capture game, to defeat his enemies, and so forth. But he still looked to his gods as being necessary to his success in any or all of these directions. And one has only to remember that to-day we have official thanksgivings to God for a good harvest, or for winning a war, or for recovery from a disease, to realize that we have amongst us millions of minds who are in these respects not substantially different from our very, very, remote ancestors. There is no essential difference between King George leading his people to a "sacred" building to induce God by prayer and semi-magical ceremonies to give us victory over Germany, and a primitive chief leading his tribe to a "sacred" forest clearing to implore his gods to help them realize their desires. There is no real difference in substance between a religious oath in a court of law, or the religious oath taken by a Member of Parliament, and the trial by ordeal, which was essentially calling on God to help man passing through the prepared ordeal which was to demonstrate his integrity or prove his innocence. It is a conventional act when our Prime Minister appeals to God to give his people victory in the war; although, if Mr. Churchill had to decide between God's help and that of the United States, there is little doubt as to the direction of his choice.

\* \* \*

### The Decay of the Gods

But there are important differences between primitive man and his gods, and that of civilized man and his gods. Primitive man had no doubt as to the existence of his gods. Civilized, educated, man is willing at the most to let it go as a mere hypothesis. The existence of the gods of primitive man is questioned by none. The gods were there, beyond doubt, and had to be reckoned with. They did not play hide and seek, revealing their presence to one here and concealing it from one there. In the early stage the gods are there for everyone to recognize, and woe to those who do not observe them. In the last stage of all we meet the gods in the defence phase of their existence, and the distinction is as great as a right which is unchallengeable compared with one that is not recognized without discussion. People never begin to look for God until they are uncertain of his existence. Primitive man may have run the risk of offending his gods, but he never questioned that they were there. In the hey-day of their existence the gods had not to meet disbelief. They needed no defence. That is possible only in an age of at least nascent disbelief. There is no paradox in the statement that the need for proof of the existence of the gods is a mark of their decline. Every priest knows this, although few will admit it openly. But they do admit it in their very defences. The priest talks of the sin of unbelief, but the responsibility for disbelief in their existence lies with the gods themselves. If the gods would have their existence recognized they should so act that no one can doubt it. If they would have men thank them for their help they should make that help patent. As it is, even the defenders of God admit by their elaborate arguments that there is really room for doubt. The pressing need for evidence of the existence of God is an undeniable admission that this existence is open to question. We do not need external evidence that the sun shines, that the wind blows, that love and hate exist. The age of evidence for the existence of God is also the age of the decline of the belief in their being.

Generally speaking the more the gods are discussed the smaller their importance. That, too, is almost

axiomatic. Discussion has its place among things that are doubtful. We do not debate certainties. In his suggestive work, *Physics and Politics*, Walter Bagehot says, dealing with the situation in Greece (the country that gave democracy to the world), that the very fact of putting a subject up for discussion admits the possibility of being wrong; and a series of discourses on the lines of the famous, "Oh God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul, from hell, if there be a hell, Amen, if necessary," is enough to turn a religious service into a pantomime. In Christianity there is no advice such as Blessed are they that examine and ask for proof, and they who decline to believe in the absence of proof. And in the New Testament we are told that Jesus could work no miracles where there was no belief. That rule applies to all miracles at all times and to all religions. The gods begin their existence as a certainty, they proceed as a probability, and end as a discarded hypothesis.

\* \* \*

### The Irrelevancy of Gods

Without saying it in so many words the whole of modern scientific thought proclaims that the hypothesis of God is useless. It does nothing; it explains nothing. There are statesmen who believe in God, so are there scientists, and philosophers, and sociologists. What reference has "God" to the real work of any of these? There is still a chaplain in the House of Commons, and there is a Bench of Bishops in the House of Lords. But a man may take his seat in the Commons without taking a religious oath, and his word of honour is counted as equal in value to "So help me God" of the Christian, and it is certain that the Speaker would rule out of order any attempt made by a Christian Member who said that a Freethinker or an Atheist could not properly discharge his duties because of his want of belief in God. And in the House of Lords the sole function of the Bishops is to safeguard the interests of the Church. And there, too, are to be found Atheists whose Atheism carries with it no implication that they are less worthy than Christians. There are many scientific men in this country who profess belief in God, but as scientists they leave their God at the laboratory door. We have also a science of ethics, and that also has no necessary reference to God. What branch of modern knowledge is there that uses the conception of God as of indispensable utility? It is not economics; it is not sociology. It is not philosophy; it is not pure science. We still have religious beliefs, just as we still have fortune-tellers and soothsayers who utilize the Sunday papers to advertise their wares. But in all these cases we are dealing with individual peculiarities, not with a universally, or even generally, recognized indispensable part of modern life. God has become irrelevant.

CHAPMAN COHEN

### DODGING THE COLUMN

If you have not heard of the King's [Geo. IV] reconciliation with the Duke of Sussex, they are worth relating. Two days before his accession the King was so ill that, if they had delayed bleeding him for half an hour, it might have killed him. At five o'clock in the morning, he sent for the Archbishop of Canterbury, and told him that he had repeated the Lord's Prayer a hundred and ten times during the night; that he hoped that might save him; and that, since a sentence in the prayer urges the forgiving of trespasses, he wished to know whether, in forgiving the person who had most sinned against him, he would be performing a deed that would entitle him to survive. The man of God lost no time in encouraging him to this act of penitence; and they sent at once for the Duke of Sussex, advising him not to speak, but to receive his brother's kiss in silence. The pantomime took place in the presence of the Duke of York.

*Private Letters of Princess Leven*, pp. 14-15

## Devils and Miracles

I OPENED my dictionary for definitions and found:—

Devil: An evil spirit or being, represented in Scripture.

Miracle: An abnormal occurrence that cannot be explained by any known natural law of cause—and is therefore assigned to supernatural agency.

In the early years of the Christian Era (we read from Church records) the casting out of devils was not an uncommon event.

Disease was believed to be caused by either a Divine Visitation owing to the sins of the sick people, or by the "possession" of devils.

Jesus believed that human disease was caused by the possession of devils, as the account of devils being exercised from the man's body to swine illustrates, and personally I could never see the justice of this transference—for even swine have rights! This miracle reflects the Jewish prejudice against pigs.

The early Catholic Church devised elaborate ceremonies with a regular ritual, for exorcising devils. The patient, bound hand and foot, was brought into church with a priest's stole around his neck, and was first drenched with "holy water."

The sign of the cross was made, litanies were recited, and the supposed devil or devils were ordered to "get out."

To further persuade the devils to evacuate, the unfortunate patients were often thrashed, made to fast, and to undergo other physical remedies which would leave the poor victims utterly exhausted.

### LUNACY CAUSED BY DEVILS

Lunatics particularly were believed to be "possessed" by devils. They were first prayed over, then flogged, or ducked in ponds.

When some more intelligent doctors ventured to suggest that the lunacy might be due to natural causes, they were persecuted, for "did not the Bible justly maintain through Jesus that disease and lunacy were caused by devils?"

A Bishop of Beauvais in the fifteenth century, cast out five devils from one sick person, and moreover "compelled the said devils to sign a deed, binding them not to molest the same person again."

In one year during the same period, the Jesuits of Vienna proclaimed that they had cast out 12,652 devils; they employed a special notary who kept count and registered each individual devil exorcised.

Even Martin Luther, who should have known better, said in 1528, "Doctors are ignorant men, because they treat disease as if it came from natural causes, whereas the truth is that the mad, the lame, the blind, the dumb and the sick are all people in whom demons have established themselves."

Luther had an interview with a devil, and threw a bottle of ink at him—the inkstain still remains on the wall—sufficient evidence for the Christians.

Two hundred years later John Wesley said "Most lunatics are demoniacs," and in 1739 John Wesley tells us he "expelled a devil from the body of a young girl."

### ST. GREGORY AND THE OBEDIENT MOUNTAIN

It is related of St. Gregory that on being challenged by a Pagan Priest to perform a miracle, "he commanded a rock as large as a mountain to remove itself to yonder place, and the mountain immediately obeyed."

So bulldozers are unnecessary, mechanical shovels can be relegated to the scrap-heap, and all that modern contractors need is "the faith that moves mountains."

The best Bible miracle was that of "pushing back the sun ten degrees to cure Hezekiah of a boil, which troubled him sore." The most extraordinary medical treatment on record!

Then Balaam's ass spoke Hebrew—but jibbed at an

angel—and Jonah lived in a whale's belly, a great "fish story." "ANOTHER WHALE OF A STORY"

In New Guinea they have a legend that outclasses "Jonah and the Whale." It is related how a great fish swallowed a boat with a whole family, but whilst "interned" the "New Guinea Family" cleverly checkmated the monster by breaking up the boat, lighting a fire with the wood, and then cutting slices from the great fish's liver and cooking them for food. Eventually the fish grew sick of its stomachic guests and threw them up, and the family swam home. A "whale of a story" that beats the Holy Bible legend to a frazzle!

Here is another "miracle" from the Saints' Calendar. A Robber always repeated an "Ave Maria" before he stole anything, but at last he was caught and sentenced to be hanged. But because of his prayers, whilst he hung on the gallows, a beautiful winged angel supported his legs, so that he was not strangled, and "he escaped with his life."

Then an Italian Parrot who was taught to say "Have mercy on me, St. Thomas," was carried skyward by a cruel Hawk, but when the parrot screamed, "Have mercy on me St. Thomas," the hawk released it from his talons, and the bird of prey ever after became converted from his cruel ways, and became a "praying bird" instead.

### "HOLY INSECTICIDE"

A Church was infested by flies (maybe it needed cleaning). St. Bernard "excommunicated" the flies, and "they immediately fell down dead, and were swept up in basketfuls."

St. Dominic, too, was a wondrous miracle worker! On one occasion a nun formed a wicked resolve to leave the convent and return to the world. As a punishment, St. Dominic caused the nun's nose to drop off her face—and it was most unbecoming for the poor young woman to go around noseless—but upon her repentance and return to the convent, St. Dominic replaced her nose again—which was really sportsman-like of the Holy Saint!

Albertus Magnus, a Dominican Bishop, manufactured a complete brass man—the first robot in history—which acted as a servant to the Bishop, who, having repented of his wicked competition with God in making a synthetic man, "broke up the robot with a hammer."

What a lot of tall-stories" the Christian Saints are responsible for! They would have made ideal press agents for Yankee Yellow newspapers.

### RELIGION MARKETED FEARS

The days of Devils and Miracles are over. Why? The Schoolmaster is abroad! Science and education have discredited the whole race of religious racketeers who exploited the fears of humanity—the miracle-mongers to-day can only follow their trade in the dark corners of the world, where superstition and credulity still linger. Listen to Bishop Henson writing in the *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1925:—

The crude demonology, the childish literalism, the abject fear, the debased Sacramentalism, scarcely superior to the fetish worship of Africa—these lie behind the exorcisms, unctions and benedictions of the Church. The remarkable decline in the death rate is the achievement of Science, not the triumph of a wonder-working Church. When miracles of healing were most numerous, public health was least satisfactory.

Can we Freethinkers put it plainer?

### ALAS! POOR DEVILS!

Poor Ghosts and Devils! They have scarcely a place in our modern world to call their own.

Science has chased them out of nearly all their old haunts—once they inhabited the whole earth, the air around us, the seas, the mountain peaks, the dark caverns, the restless rivers—they also lodged in human bodies, even the poor pigs were afflicted with them.

Now they are cribbed, cabined and confined in the dour prisoned minds of the Christian fundamentalists. Soon they will find their last resting place on the dust-laden shelves of the museums of dead theologies.

'Tis a sad, sad end, for the churches owe them much gratitude, as the poor old ghosts and devils were the most profitable selling line the religion-mongers ever had, and if the Christians had an ounce of gratitude, they would erect a memorial stone to them. Here is a suggested inscription:—

HIC JACET

The mental remains of our valuable helpers—  
THE GHOSTS AND DEVILS

Slain by the searching rays of science.

Deeply lamented by all orthodox Christians.

They filled our collection boxes and brought fat  
Endowments.

Well done, thou faithful Servants!

R.I.P. HENRY J. HAYWARD

### What We Are

If we are ever inclined to consider ourselves in the least degree superior to the rest of the crowd it may, perhaps, give us another view-point and have a salutary effect if we sit down, preferably alone, and try to figure out just what position we occupy in the general scheme of things, and how we come to be where and what we are.

Every child born into the world is, of course, the immediate product of two people, who in turn are the product of four others, they of eight and they of sixteen, so that, to go no farther back than the child's great-grandparents, it is correct to say—assuming that it is a male child—that he is the final product of 30 different individuals. And assuming, still further, that the average life of those ancestors was fifty years, the child, when born, is the sum-total of two hundred years of breeding and experience in a progressive world. In other words, he is what he is partly—but only partly—by virtue of what his parents were and are in physical and mental make-up, what *their* parents, and *their* parents and *their* parents were—and so on, back through a couple of centuries.

Some of us are apt to overlook that pertinent fact when we stick out our chests with pride, and take a lot of credit to ourselves for what we imagine ourselves to be: far above the common herd in this and that and the other—we are apt, that is to say, to ignore the fact that many forces—physical and mental and social forces—have been at work and planted us where we are to-day, and that we ourselves have had really very little to do with it.

Assume the case of a child born to-day—in the year 1941, that his parents were forty years of age at the time of his birth, and that his grand-parents and great-grand-parents both lived their allotted span of three-score-years-and-ten. That means that his great-grandparents were in their prime before the French Revolution broke out—in 1789—and when the general conditions of life in this country as well as on the Continent were perfectly appalling, when the great majority of the people of this "fair land" of ours were totally illiterate, woefully ignorant, miserably housed, without any sanitation, very hard worked, scandalously paid and scandalously fed—very many, in fact, on the borderline of starvation.

Things were a little better when his grandparents were alive and youthful, admittedly, but even then they were shocking—measured by our standards. We are thinking of a century ago, bear in mind. There was still little or no sanitation, widespread illiteracy, bad—very bad—housing, bad food—for the workpeople, bastardy and drunkenness were prevalent—as was the oppression of the poor, thousands and thousands of whom, together with their children—

from seven years upwards—were forced to work under the most dreadful conditions, in the mines and mills and factories, excessively long hours seven days a week, for a miserable pittance, the children for one shilling and the parents for only a few shillings a week—scarcely enough to keep body and soul together. In those days slavery was still a profitable business in some parts of the world, but in England a man could be—and frequently was—hauled before the Courts for not going to church on the Sabbath, yet he was free to knock his wife about if he wished to do so, and could even sell her to the highest bidder if he thought fit. Merry England a hundred years ago!

Just over a hundred years ago Richard Carlile, his wife and sister were all imprisoned because they sought to bring enlightenment to the people, and since their time there have been dozens—Hetherington, Southwell, Holyoake, Gott, Foote, to name only a few—who have suffered in the same way and for the same cause: freedom, freedom from the enslavement of the human body and mind. The pioneers—the pioneers in science and social well-being—have always had to pay dearly for their daring, and it is largely to those to whom we who are living to day are so greatly indebted for what we have and are.

During the life-time of the father of the child whom we have in mind while making these reflections there have, of course, been vast and far-reaching improvements, although men fly at each other's throats more ferociously than ever they did since the dawn of civilization, and indulge in mass murder-war. But, generally speaking, the people of this country—of the world at large—are better housed and better fed, receive better pay for their labour, have more leisure and more pleasure than mankind has ever known before, and those improved conditions, plus what he inherits from his parents, help to make our imaginary child what he is.

The truth of the matter is, of course, that every one of us, separately and together, inherits the result of the labours of mankind from prehistoric times down to date. This is passed on to us, in body and mind, not only by our parents—who may be capable of doing little or much for us, according to their degree of enlightenment and their will and ability to be of assistance—but by the thousands of others who have struggled in the cause of human emancipation. We are, so to speak, the cumulative effect of thousands of years of trial and error and struggle and strife.

Some claim to be "self-taught"—which, of course, is sheer nonsense. None of us is self-taught in the sense in which that phrase is so often used. We may have had little schooling, but that is of little moment if we have become at all thoughtful and studious and gone elsewhere—to books, for example, or someone better informed than ourselves—for information and guidance. Others boast of their "blue blood," but in many cases this is nothing to boast about, and merely means that they have been spoon-fed, and are inclined to look through the wrong end of the telescope.

Taking the long view it is very wide of the mark to think or to say that we were fashioned—even physically—by our parents. True they were responsible for our final entry into the world, but they were no more wholly and solely responsible for what they were than the sea is responsible for its contents and outcrop; consequently they cannot claim to be jointly and entirely responsible for what we are.

We are, to sum up, the final product—the up-to-date product, that is—of millions of years of the evolutionary process, of thousands upon thousands of marriages and intermarriages, and the various social and economic forces which have been tried as the years rolled by, and these, severally and together, have contributed to our make-up—whatever that may be.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN

## Phrenology and Determinism

IN a review of Blatchford's *What's All This?* in the *New English Weekly* of January 30, the reviewer, one C. J. Woollen, writes this passage:—

It is the old story of having it both ways. Chesterton accused Blatchford of holding that the drunkard or thieving tramp is not responsible, and yet that the rulers of State and the richest men in the Empire are. Blatchford denied just those things that he accused Chesterton of denying. Chesterton had no wish to deny the power of environment, but Blatchford was denying it—for the rich. According to him there appeared to be one natural law for the rich, and another for the poor. . . . It is that, of course, that cuts the ground from Determinism. It has no place for the tender feelings to which in fact it is appealing. And if the determinist should claim, as he must to be consistent, that the feelings also are determined, he has no right to value them higher than if they were harsh. . . . His [Blatchford's] keen sense of injustice gives his determinism the lie. There is another characteristic of Mr. Blatchford that completely shatters the determinist synthesis. . . . he has a profound reverence for women.

One might well borrow the title of Blatchford's book and ask: What's all this about? We all speak and act as if we had free wills because we *can't help* doing so. Those of us who are determinists can therefore claim that Blatchford's inconsistency "illustrates determinism. Apart from that, when Blatchford attacks the rich he becomes, for the moment, part of the environment of the rich. And since even upholders of the free-will philosophy allow that there is a power in environment to modify conduct, Blatchford is entitled to hope that his words may bring about a change in the attitude of the rich. The free-will philosopher, however strongly he insists on the power of man to "conquer his environment," can't deny that what we say or do to each other modifies our thinking and acting. We are agencies through which a multitude of deterministic forces are working. The resultant of their energies is what we call our "will."

Personally I do not like the term "environment." It suggests a something *not me* surrounding a different something called *me*. In this sense it won't do at all if the line of demarcation separates one part of my mind from the rest. And that, I maintain, is demonstrated by the discoveries of Dr. Gall, the father of phrenology. The teaching of that science shows that while, physically, I possess a brain, mentally, this brain possesses me. That is not all. This brain, which has taken up quarters in my cranium, is not a homogeneous organ, but a family of organs, and a divided one at that, for not one of its members will occupy the same room as another. There are over forty of them, and each is a specialist in a different mode of activity from the rest. They would cramp each other's style if mixed up promiscuously. So they keep apart. Nevertheless they can argue with each other in any combination according to the issue to be debated. Each has access by house-telephone to every other. As for "me," I am not even the operator. The connections are made automatically. You may call "me" the wires—but with this difference, that this "me" understands something, though not all, of what is debated through the receivers. To put the relationship more realistically, "me" consists of my lips, tongue and other members which function in speech and action. What is to be said or done by me is decided by a majority vote of the family who have taken a life-lease of my cranium.

It is the same with everyone. Not only that, but in every cranium considered as a block of flats, the same member of the family is always to be found on the same floor and at the same number. Their relative locations never alter throughout the fifteen hun-

dred millions of skulls which measure the population of the world.

But, and lastly, there is one important variation, although the number in the family is the same, the relative strengths of the individual members—their powers of getting their own way—are never the same as between one family and another. In the conventional phrase, no two people are alike; which means, now to use phrenological terminology, that in no two cases does every organ of the brain function with the same relative or actual strength. Indeed, in many cases, some organs hardly function at all. And in all cases these families of organs contain members who are over-developed or under-developed. We all diverge from the norm—which justifies the originator of the saying that we are all a little bit mad.

There is necessarily an average size of the complete brain, and any particular brain can be larger or smaller within certain ascertained limits. And so with each organ of the brain. They are not all the same size—some need more room to function than others. That is so even in the (theoretical) normal or "standard" brain, in which the various organs occupy space in "standard" proportions. But in practically every actual brain there is a variation from those proportions. And to that extent some organs function at the expense of others. In the language of the coroner, the "balance" of everybody's mind is "disturbed."

Now the fact, the nature, and the measure, of these disturbances are registered by the contours of the cranium. These contours take the shapes of the organs within. As a whole they indicate the prevailing characteristics of the brain, and therefore of the mind, and therefore of the behaviour, of the person under inspection. These are determined at birth (really before) and are dependably registered within a few weeks afterwards. So that, in respect of any infant, the phrenologist can predict its general reactions to given sets of circumstances. Not, of course, in the fortune-telling sense, nor with anything like complete detailed accuracy, but, nevertheless with a general degree of precision sufficient to prove itself under the test of verification. It is the same with beasts and birds. Their skulls match their characters; and since brains are formed before characters can be revealed in action, the science of phrenology is seen to shatter the free-will philosophy.

That is why phrenology is the Cinderella of the sciences, while her ugly sisters, Superstition and pseudo-Science are trotted off to all the balls. And yet phrenology is a branch of the respected science of physiology, and, in some degree, of anatomy, because there is a correspondence between cranial contours and physiognomical bone-structure. All three sciences are interlocked—which further consolidates the foundation of determinist philosophy.

JOHN GRIMM  
(To be concluded)

## Acid Drops

What the Archbishop of Canterbury did *not* say on the Day of National Prayer—Never has so little been done by *One*, and for so few.

We beg to call the attention of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the fact that our Government, despite the assertion of a number of its members who are professed Christians, has not asked the United States to pray for us, but to work for us. They have not asked President Roosevelt to send us more parsons, but to send us acroplanes and guns and ships. We venture to remind those responsible that it would be in keeping with God's practice if he turns sulky and says, in effect: You omitted me in your negotiations with the United States, so I am just remaining a neutral. It is true that Cardinal Hinsley has provided a large number of Roman Catholic soldiers with a special medal, blessed by himself, but no statistics have been published as to the effect of these holy mas-

cots. We should like to see an equal number of soldiers decorated with rabbit's feet and a careful account of the casualties published and compared.

That curious body of exhibitionists, known as the Oxford Group, or Buchmanites, has been, on the surface, very quiet since war began. But it will be a surprise to many, as it was to us, to learn that they have been classed as being "reserved" on the ground that they were *all of them* "lay evangelists." We don't know what or who was responsible for this (someone in high position we assume), but on that ground every member of the Salvation Army might be also reserved. So might everyone who takes an active part in the life of the Church or Chapel. It looks as though Buchman and his followers must have some very influential persons on their roll. The privilege is now being withdrawn.

The founder and head of this body was "Dr." Buchman, who is an American, born, it is stated, in the German-settled region of Pennsylvania, and who publicly announced, "I thank God for a man like Adolf Hitler." An American correspondent of the *News-Chronicle* says the members of the Oxford Group are very reticent as to the whereabouts of their leader, and people are "beginning to question the motives of this "moral disarmament group," and to wonder where the money is coming from. But, we should like to know, by whose influence the whole of the Oxford Group have hitherto been protected from military service.

Sir Charles Marston protests, in the *Daily Telegraph*, against theatre opening on Sunday. He seems afraid it may offend God. He says the "unseen" has often helped us. We cannot tell, and we should like to know how the unseen, the unheard, and the unknown, have helped us. But perhaps it is the non-existent who have benefited in this way. In that case we confess our inability to deny the truth of the statement. Some people's information about the unknowable and the unthinkable is really remarkable. Sir Charles Marston cites Dunkirk as an example of what God does for us. But what was he doing during *the series of disasters* that led to the escape of some of our men? Why did he not save the lot, or blow up the munitions found so useful?

Whether God does look after the simple sparrow or not, he certainly seems to have overlooked his churches in the German air-raids over this country. In London alone, the most recent figures show that 259 churches have been completely destroyed, while 613 have been more or less damaged. In the provinces, the figures are 270 and 844 respectively. Owing (according to some people) the breaking away from the true Church, the Free Churches have suffered the worst, and the Roman Catholics the least; though 45 monasteries and convents have been destroyed. We have an idea from these figures that churches have suffered far worse than pubs. Is it blasphemy to suggest that this may be actually God's intention? If it is, can any other reason be given for the baffling immunity of beer-drinking and dart-playing locals?

Once again we get a marvellous piece of reasoning from the Pope. "War," he pontifically declared, "is due to disbelief in God." And the group of missionary students to whom he made this perspicuous pronouncement no doubt were lost in amazement at the way in which God's representative on earth hit the nail on the head, so to speak. But, as most of the people in the conquered countries were sincere believers and never wanted war, we wonder, with many other people, exactly where the disbelief comes in. And there will be no answer. One need not do more than refer to the large number of wars blessed by the Papacy—which include both the recent wars in Abyssinia and Spain. But neither the Pope, nor Baldwin, nor Lord Simon, nor Samuel Hoare, nor Mr. Chamberlain, saw that these wars would lead to our war. Now if we were foolish enough to believe in the God theory, we hope we should have enough common sense left to say "God is not mocked"; he'll get his own back, one day.

Religion was born in credulity. That was a very long time ago. Then man began to develop an understanding of things, and after a certain stage of development had

been reached religion began to lose ground, and like a stone hurtling down a mountain side its speed became greater as it neared the bottom. Then a substitute for credulity, or at least a buttress for its protection, was discovered in sheer impudence.

Christianity is a wonderful religion to get hold of. It does not prevent a man committing murder, but it does enable him to get "saved," and to convey his forgiveness to others, also to feel sorry that they are not right with Jesus. Thus, there were four men executed for murder. They were permitted to broadcast from their cells. The first said he had made himself right with God, and was the happiest man on earth. We suspect he will have a front place in heaven. It will serve him right. The second said he had made his peace with God, and the future could look after itself. The third thanked the people of the State (Louisiana) for their hospitality. The acknowledgement was very decent. But the fourth appears to be the best of the lot. He merely told the public that the only communication from the outside world he had was a notice from a newspaper that his subscription had run out. He had written to the proprietor to say that had he read his own paper he would have known that he was to be hanged soon; and he did not know his future address. That man does not deserve to go to heaven, but to some place where decent company may be met.

Although it is hardly worth referring to again, we note that the *Church Times*, in its review of the discussion between "Three men and a Parson," was not particularly enthusiastic. It pointed out that they all read from a script, which rather knocked on the head that here was a genuine free and untrammelled talk, and it admitted that one of the men was never really answered. Moreover "discussions such as these will lose half their value unless adequate follow-up is given." The word "value" here seems rather redundant, but in any case, the only follow-up allowed would be more blather about "our Lord," and where in heaven could that lead us to? Only one question need be answered—did the discussion lead even *one* Freethinker back to Jesus? If not, from the B.B.C. point of view, what good did it do?

According to a communication sent to a German correspondent of a Swiss paper there has been a steadily growing demand for the Bible in Germany. In 1930, 1,000,000 copies were sold. In 1935, the number had increased to 1,225,000 copies, and in 1940 to 1,520,000. We do not think our Archbishops, who deny the Christianity of Germany, will be pleased at the news, and just when they are boosting the Bible as hard as they can, and hope to get it more firmly established in the schools!

For our part we are not at all surprised. We have always insisted on the intensely religious quality of Nazism, and much of its most forbidding teaching, as we have often pointed out, is based on the Bible. The people chosen of God, the separateness of the chosen people from the common herd, the prohibition of having any other God than the one that is established, the denial of intermarriage with the non-chosen people, the death penalty for heretical teaching, and so forth. And could the Nazis hope to find a better description of their practice than this—which comes from God himself.

The Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction.

And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven; then shall no man be able to stand before thee.

I will render vengeance on mine enemies, and will reward them that hate thee.

And when the Lord hath delivered (a city) into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women and the little ones, and the cattle and all that is in that city, even the spoil thereof, thou shalt take unto thyself, and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. . . . Of the cities of these people which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance thou shalt save nothing that breatheth.

Decidedly Hitler might do worse, from his point of view to see that his followers carry a Bible in their knapsack. And the Bible, on the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury, contains the "Oracles of God."

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

"FREETHINKER" WAR DAMAGE FUND.—"A Caller," 10s.; A. M. Metelonis (U.S.A.), £1 10s.; J. Christie, £1; J. Hunter, 5s.; J. Angus, 10s.; A. Blair, 5s.; C. H. Mair, 10s.; W. B. Powell, 7s. 6d.

A. M. METELONIS (U.S.A.).—Many thanks for your letter; kind wishes heartily reciprocated. Pleased to learn that the *Freethinker* is your most satisfying reading every week. We should like to get a few thousand new readers with the same sentiment.

S. HARBOUR.—Thanks for new subscriber; paper sent as requested.

B. B. BONNER.—Your letter on "God and the War" was far too good for insertion in the *News-Chronicle*. To ensure insertion in a London daily of a letter attacking religion you must write as though you were qualifying for an idiot asylum.

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.

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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.

## A Correction and an Apology

WE were guilty of an unfortunate blunder in last week's *Freethinker*. There are two well known publicists, Mr. Beverley Baxter and Mr. Beverley Nichols. The latter is a regular contributor to the *Sunday Chronicle*, and it was he we had in mind when writing our "Views and Opinions" for March 23. Unfortunately Mr. Baxter occupied our mind in writing the notes, and throughout the article we referred to Mr. Beverley Baxter when we should have written, Mr. Beverley Nichols. We sincerely hope that this blunder has not caused either inconvenience or serious annoyance to Mr. Baxter, and in any case we offer him our sincere regret and apology for the blunder.

CHAPMAN COHEN

## Sugar Plums

After a long and weary struggle the Manchester City Council has at last agreed to the opening of Cinemas on Sunday. To spend so much time over so simple a matter is enough to disprove the old saw (of course, a Manchester saw), that what Manchester thinks to-day the rest of England will think to-morrow. As a matter of fact, it has taken a world war for the Manchester authorities to come to the decision that a citizen need not ask permission of his long-faced religious neighbour whether he may do on Sunday what no one would question his doing at any other time. What with a crowd of Ministers who issue decrees which no one may ignore, suppress papers without any reason given, and no right of appeal against the ukase, it really does look as though it were time we began to prepare for the fight for freedom that will have to be fought when this war is won and over.

Although Sunday entertainments are not to be legalized in Scotland, there is no lack of attendances when theatres there are opened—for charitable purposes. It may safely be said that ninety per cent of those who go to a theatre on Sunday (when they have the chance) do not go for the purpose of helping whatever charity there is to benefit. Recently the *Scottish Daily Express* found that in those towns where entertainments were being given, all except one—a canteen show—were crowded out. But the Scottish clergy will not have their chief day of business interfered with, and those who do not go

to Church and have nothing to do must spend their time loafing.

Something in the nature of "letting the cat out of the bag" appears in one of a number of letters which appear in the *Church of England Newspaper* among a number of letters condemning the action of the Government in permitting theatres to be open on Sundays. Here is the significant passage:—

It is amazing that the *Government* should commence a campaign to encourage Christian and religious education, and at the same time sanction an act which will without doubt smash it to pieces.

The italics are ours, and they reveal a lot. But not anything of which we have not warned our readers. We have never known so widespread an outburst of articles and letters in the British press on one subject as have appeared in newspapers from Penzance to John O'Groats on the matter of establishing in the schools definite religious teaching, seeing to it that it permeates the whole of the school time, and that the teachers believe the religion they are forced to teach. The campaign covers all newspapers, big and little, and in the main the advocacy has too great a similarity not to have been inspired from a centre, and the confidence that this scheme will succeed is too pronounced for it not to rest on an understanding with powerful political personages.

One need not look very far in the present Government to name at least half a dozen prominent members who are likely to have encouraged the archbishops and bishops in their campaign. It must be remembered that only recently the Minister of Education informed the House of Commons that he was greatly interested in religious education, and not a single member had the courage to point out that as Minister of Education he had no right to express that opinion at all. And outside the Government there are other political Christians who will work with might and main to get us back to the pre-1870 conditions with regard to religion. When the war is over these reactionary influences will still be in power, and if the life of the present Parliament is prolonged—as it is likely to be—the religious leaders will see to it that they get the unpublished understanding carried out.

In that case those who do not wish the nation's schools to be turned into a happy hunting ground for the churches and chapels will largely have themselves to blame. And there is, apart from campaigning against it, the easy method of withdrawing children from religious instruction. Not merely avowed Freethinkers, but all who do not believe that it is the business of the Government to teach religion should take a hand. If only twenty in a school were so withdrawn, it might act as a healthy reminder that the Government—and the Churches—are treading on dangerous ground. We have been asked by the Government to give winning the war the first place in our minds. The Churches and Christians in political positions are taking advantage of the war to convert teachers into the catspaws of the parsonry, and the schools into breeding places for church and chapel attendants. It is a villainous situation.

(Continued from next column)

Who are his Ministers, pretends to know,  
And all their several Offices below:  
How many Chaudrons he each year expends  
In Coals for roasting Huguenots, and Fiends:  
And with as much exactness states the case,  
As if h'ad been Surveyor of the place.

Another frights the Rout with ruful Stories,  
Of wild Chimaeras, Limbo's, Purgatories,  
And bloated Souls in smoaky durance hung,  
Like a Westphalia Gammon, or Neats Tongue,  
To be redeemed with Masses, and a Song.  
A good round sum must the Deliv'rance buy,  
For none may there swear out on poverty.  
Your rich, and bounteous Shades are only cas'd,  
No Flect, or Kings-Bench Ghosts are thence releas'd.

JOHN OLDHAM (1653-1683)

Extract From John Oldham's Fourth  
"Satyr upon the Jesuits" (1679)

Prepared by DONALD DALE

Here Beads are blest, and Pater nosters fram'd,  
(By some the Tallies of Devotion nam'd)  
Which of their Pray'rs and Oraisons keep tale,  
Lest they, and Heaven should in the reck'ning fail.  
Here Sacred Lights, the Altars graceful Pride,  
Are by Priests Breath perfum'd and Sanctified;  
Made some of Wax, of Her'ticks Tallow some,  
A Gift, which Irish Emma sent to Rome:  
For which great Merit worthily (we're told)  
She's now amongst her Country-Saints inroll'd.  
Here holy banners are reserved in store,  
And Flags, such as the fam'd Armada bore:  
And hallow'd swords, and Daggers kept for use,  
When resty Kings the Papal Yoke refuse;  
And consecrated Rats-bane, to be laid  
For Her'tick Vermin, which the Church invade.

But that which brings in most of Wealth and Gain,  
Does best the Priests swoln Tripes, and Purses strain;  
Here they each Week their constant Auctions hold  
Of Reliques, which by Candles Inch are sold:  
Saints by the dozen here are set to sale,  
Like Mortals wrought in Gingerbread on Stall.  
Hither are loads from emptied Channels brought,  
And Voiders of the Worms from Sextons bought;  
Hair from the Skulls of dying Strumpets shorn,  
And Felons Bones from rifled Gibbets torn;  
Are past for Sacred to the cheap'ning Rout;  
And worn on Fingers, Breasts, and Ears about.  
This boasts a Scrap of me, and that a Bit  
Of good St. George, St. Patrick, or St. Kit.  
These Locks S. Bridget's were, and those S. Clare's;  
Some for S. Catherine's go, and some for her's  
That wip'd her Saviour's feet, washed with her tears.

Here you may see my wounded leg, and here  
Those, which to China bore the great Xavier.  
Those are S. Laurence Coals expos'd to view,  
Strangely preserv'd, and kept alive till now.  
Yon is the Baptist's Coat, and one of's Heads,  
The rest are shewn in many a place besides;  
And of his Teeth as many Sets there are,  
As on their Belts six Operators wear.  
Here Blessed Mary's Milk, not yet turn'd sour,  
Renown'd (like Asses) for its healing pow'r,  
Ten Holland Kine scarce in a year give more.  
Here is the Soldiers Spear, and Passion-Nails  
Whose quantity would serve for building Pauls.  
Here Shoes, which, once perhaps at Newgate hung,  
Angled their Charity, that pass'd along,  
Now for S. Peter's go, and th' Office bear  
For Priests, they did for lesser Villains there.

These are the Fathers Implements, and Tools,  
Their gawdy Trangums for inveigling Fools:  
These serve for Baits the simple to ensnare,  
Like Children spirited with Toys at Fair.  
Nor are they half the Artifices yet,  
By which the Vulgar they delude, and cheat:  
Which should I undertake, much easier I,  
Much sooner might compute what Sins there be  
Wip'd off, and pardon'd at a Jubilee.  
What Bribes enrich the Datary each year,  
Or Vices treated on by Escobar:  
How many Whores in Rome profess the Trade,  
Or greater numbers by Confession made.

One Undertakes by Scale of Miles to tell  
The Bounds, Dimensions, and Extent of Hell;  
How far and wide th' Infernal Monarch Reigns,  
How many German Leagues his Realm contains:

(Continued on preceding column)

A Book About Books

I.

LET me admit at the outset that books about books always exercise a certain fascination for me. I love those long, straggling reviews of famous literary works in which a book and its author are analysed, commented upon, and explained with a wealth of relevant detail all designed to help a reader on the path of more complete understanding. The literary essays of such great critics as Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Dr. Johnson, and many others, whose names come readily to anyone who knows English literature, not only give us real enlightenment on famous books, but are extremely interesting in themselves. And for those who know French, can they find anything more engrossing than the wonderful *Causeries du Lundi*, as they were named, of Sainte-Beuve in which that eminent critic ranged almost the whole of the great literature of the world?

Even the books about books of lesser men have very often a charm of their own, and I must confess I used to read Robert Blatchford's appreciation of the books he liked best with the keenest enjoyment. And I have never been able to understand why John M. Robertson has not been admitted into the front rank of literary critics. I think he can take that stand on the score of his criticisms of books and their authors alone, above many men who have for some reason or other achieved far higher reputations.

This leads me to call attention to one of the best of books about books I have had the good fortune recently to come across. Though published by Routledge, it is, I think, by an American, Burton Rascoe, and its title is *Titans of Literature*. Mr. Rascoe admits that he would have liked to include many other great authors and their works in his very excellent survey, and one can only hope he will produce another volume on the same plan dealing with his more obvious omissions. But one must not be too greedy. In this volume of nearly 600 pages will be found not only many excellent appreciations of some of our greatest literary treasures, but also many independent judgments. Mr. Rascoe was not to be brow-beaten, and it is good to come across a critic who is not afraid to say what he thinks about idols whose reputation has been taken so much for granted that heretics on this point were generally looked upon as mad, or ignorant, or silly, or all three.

Those readers who have never troubled much about what are called the great classics—Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Virgil, Horace and the rest will find Mr. Rascoe an engrossing guide who has the additional faculty of spurring on a reader to study these great Greek and Latin authors for himself. There is no need to worry about learning the original languages in which they wrote. There are many excellent translations, duly noted by the critic. No one who loves books can afford to miss the poems and plays of the Greek and Latin writers, most of whom were producing world masterpieces centuries before our era. It is Mr. Rascoe's pleasant task to explain in very clear language why these works are masterpieces, and why they still excite wonder and interest even in our own more sophisticated age.

From them the critic goes immediately to what he calls "Dante and the Medieval Mind." And it is here he comes to grips with so many judgments which are generally taken for granted. The *Divine Comedy* of the Italian poet has taken its place in the very front line of world literature, and very few people have the nerve to say that it is in many respects a boring piece of work which has been vastly over-rated. Mr. Rascoe thinks it comical that "the commentators



on Dante seek to perpetuate the fallacy that Dante is still worth reading." He adds:—

I see Matthew Arnold shining up one tree, Macaulay up another, Carlyle up another, George Saintsbury up still another, and so and so on, no less than a thousand of them up a thousand trees, all jabbering about the ineffable beauties of a dreary catalogue of names and vices and about the grand style of a poem that, by any sensible standards whatever, is no more worthy of admiration than a carved replica of the battleship Maine assembled inside a bottle.

Dante—outside Italy—seems to have achieved such a great reputation that many people think he was the highest peak of Italian literature and that "the genius of the country had never been able to live up to it," as was claimed by Professor Borghese. This was repeated by Mr. Rascoe "to an irreverent Italian of great scholarship and discrimination, who said, 'No. The real trouble is that Italian literature has never been able to live it down.'"

The *Divine Comedy* is one of the few things I have repeatedly tried to read right through (of course in translation, that of Cary) without success. A few of the stanzas invariably would lead me to think of everything under the sun except the poem itself; but I never had the courage to say so outright. A hint that such was the case among my literary friends generally resulted in a loud laugh at my hopeless lack of taste—just as my heresy on the question of the Shakespeare authorship of the plays brings me angry bursts of violent temper from those in the know. I must say, therefore, that I was particularly pleased to read this further criticism:—

The *Divine Comedy*, like the Holy Roman Empire, which Dante admired, and which was neither Holy nor Roman nor yet an Empire, is not an epic; it is not divine; it is not comedy; nor, except in a few isolated passages, is it poetry. It is not a story; there is no pleasing figure in it performing heroic actions. The *Inferno* is not even elevated treatment of an elevated subject; it is a petulant act of revenge. . . . Even as allegory it is not as sublime in conception as the *Pilgrim's Progress*. . . . The "testimony," the spiritual experience of Dante, is, in character and spirit, exactly like that of the derelicts of a Salvation Army mission who achieve grace every Sunday night and fall out of it again on Monday. The plight of these derelicts is a subject for pity, irony and pathos, and is capable of being transmuted into poetry of the highest order; but Dante describing himself in a similar plight, is either arrogant and complacent, or whining and maudlin.

And our independent critic goes on to give reasons for his opinion of the *Divine Comedy* in general, and of Dante in particular. These are worth reading.

He is of an altogether different opinion of the work of Boccaccio, his essay on this world-famous writer being a thoroughly enthusiastic appreciation of the delightful stories of the *Decameron*—even if they are not exactly fit for young schoolgirls. "The *Decameron* is," says our critic, "the highest type, the prose masterpiece, of a literary genre in which mankind has always taken delight and probably will. . . . It is a very fortunate thing for all of us that there is a *Decameron* to counterpoise the *Divine Comedy*." And he goes on to point out that while the *Divine Comedy* was designed to prepare the reader for the life to come, the *Decameron* was designed to prepare the reader for life on earth—"And there you have, the difference between the essence of the Middle Ages and the essence of the Renaissance." Or as we would put it, the difference between religion and Secularism. Mr. Rascoe has many other judgments worth repeating for their frank heresy—a trait which should appeal to Freethinkers. And he backs his opinion up with solid argument.

H. CUTNER

## What is Freethought?

(Continued from page 143)

HUMILITY has been enjoined as a virtue. But whether humility be a virtue or not, it is very certain that backbonelessness or swallowing everything you are bidden, is none. Nor is robustness of mind a matter of intellect. The greatest of English philosophers, described by a poet as "the brightest, wisest, meanest of mankind," was weak enough to subject his mind to his inferiors' ideas for mere greed of money and position. One can have a bold, honest, sincere, independent mind even if that mind be not an intellect of purest ray serene. And it is a commonplace that the finest mind can, and sometimes does, prostitute and enslave itself as an unworthy Cause or pursuit, or to worldly authority from weakness, timidity, greed, or some other baseness.

We arrive, then, at the conclusion that any mind of whatsoever quality, may be a free-thinking mind. In other words, that any man may be—and that every man ought to be—a Freethinker.

### II.

Can there be any doubt that every man ought to think freely for himself? Yes, reply many excellent folk. The human mind, cursed with a burden of inherited (the theologian's "original") sin, or a burden of ignorance and fallibility, needs to submit itself to the guidance of Holy Church or the Absolute State or the Bible or whatever mumbo-jumbo they reverence most. Left to itself, the mind may go astray like a sheep without a shepherd.

Used of the body, such authoritative arguments are applicable only to childhood, idiocy, or invalidism; and no doubt mental children, mental idiots, or mental invalids, need nurses or keepers. But the adult and healthy mind should remember that (to paraphrase certain words attributed to Jesus Christ) the Church or State is made for man, not man for the Church or State; and the mind therefore should not submit itself to any such entity, but should submit the entity to itself. In a word, the mind will appraise and not merely accept, any institution's doctrine whatever sanction, supernatural or patriotic, that doctrine may claim to have behind it, or however much it may claim to be above criticism. No Freethinker (however conscious of the defects or limitations of his own mentality), will accept the doctrine that the untrammelled mind of man is not adequate with its own unaided strength to pursue and capture truth or beauty or goodness.

And believing in the free mind, the Freethinker will prefer the value of freedom above and beyond all other values—above so-called revelation or everlasting rewards or punishments in another world, or the success of an individual or nationalism or internationalism in this world. Freedom of thought precedes and leads to freedom of speech and freedom of action and association. And unless thought be free, religious freedom, personal freedom, will soon perish either of inanition or the aggression of tyrants. If a man is content to sink his own mind in any corporate mind, he can no longer develop in conscious vitality, an independent personality. The servile mind reduces its owner to the unimportance of a sheep needing a shepherd, or a slave needing a task-master. To sink one's individuality in that of the herd or mass is indeed to surrender one's real place in the significance and scope of human existence.

The elimination of individuality and the imposition of stringent herd-discipline over thought, as well as expression and action, is the tyrant's or dictator's aim—whether the tyrant be a totalitarian or a democratic Government. It may lead to national aggrandizement and the baser forms of national success. But the true success of a nation or group does not depend upon

success in war or increase of material lands or wealth, but upon its civilization and culture. A Shakespeare is worth more to England; a Pasteur to France; a Goethe or a Beethoven or an Ehrlich to Germany, than a hundred battles or a dozen colonies. It is a nation's saints and seers, its prophets, its philosophers, its poets, its artists and musicians, its inventors and discoverers, and teachers, who matter far more than its falsely over-valued soldiers and politicians. Above all, such representative individuals matter not only to the nation but to the world.

The parrot-cry of "discipline" and "unity," by which freethinking is challenged by those who believe in convention and conformity at all costs, is negated as useful by the facts of modern life. Modern warfare (1940-1) shows clearly that the ancient soulless military discipline imposed arbitrarily from without is useless before tanks, machine-guns, bombs, and high-explosive. No discipline except self-discipline remains truly valid in modern warfare. (General Sir Archibald Wavell bears emphatic testimony to this fact.) For the routine discipline of the barrack-square, the modern soldier or airman has to substitute initiative, self-discipline, and free association. Similarly, unreal "unity" as in such bodies as nations (such as both "dictatorships" and "democracies" impose in war-time) inhibits national development and will break down directly the restraint of war-government breaks, as it must with the coming of peace.

But that self-discipline, which is compounded of self-control and unity-with-himself, alone is compatible with the freedom of man's mind. For mental liberty does not mean mental licence or mental desultoriness. It is an ordered liberty which obeys its own native, inward compulsions, "the still small voice" of the Higher Law, truth to oneself. To such a mind its sphere of thought is Empire enough.

That great Freethinker and great man, Sir Richard Burton, expressed this, the creed of the Freethinker, most admirably in *The Kasidah*, a poem everyone should read:—

He noblest lives and noblest dies who makes and keeps his  
self-made laws.  
All other life is living Death, a world where none but phan-  
toms dwell  
A breath, a wind, a sound, a voice, a tinkling of the camel-  
bell.

Assuming that the reader is ready to accept the doctrine of Freethought, he may well ask: "How shall I free my own mind?"

The answer is by adopting a mental attitude of questioning, analysis and appraisal instead of an attitude of inertia, indifference or acquiescence. To each phenomenon or statement that presents itself, a Freethinker must ask "What in reality is this?" He must not accept things, persons, or statements at their face-values or their seeming-values. He will cultivate a standpoint of challenge and inquiry; the critical—not to be confused with the carping or discontented—attitude towards all things from a God to a broadcast statement. He will strive to see things as they are. He will steadfastly refuse to see them as others would have him see them, veiled and swathed in the fog of their views, loyalties, prejudices, or distorted to serve their interests. The pure and naked reality divested of all adventitious garments of deceit is what he will strive to see.

Probably no man who ever lived was more adept at divesting human life of hypocrisy and unreality than the Greek Socrates; and Socratic dialogue may still be studied by the free-thinker with profit. Probably no man ever looked out upon the human dailiness of life with calmer, clearer, and more equable mental eyes than the Roman Marcus Aurelius, and his *Meditations* will excellently serve the purpose of men seeking to emancipate their minds.

But so natural is freedom to men's minds that virtually every great author, be he of whatever section of

literature—poetry, philosophy, *belles-lettres*, history, biography—yes, and even theology, will be found to sound the authentic note, sometimes, in spite of his theories and himself. Such theologians as Cardinal Newman of the Roman Church and Bishop Gore of the Anglican Church, although their freedom of thought is narrowly circumscribed by the rigid bounds of their Faith, are yet, within those limits, a kind of free-thinker. "O God, I could be bounded within a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space," says Hamlet: and a thinker may think freely within a narrow sphere and so be of value to the true free-thinker to that extent. The free-thinker will find his mental food not merely in the words and works of Free Thinkers (strictly so-called) but everywhere, for it is everywhere that the universal birthright of freedom is to be found.

For instance, the Freethinker may doubt the divinity or even the historicity of Jesus Christ. But whether he does or not, this will not blind his eyes and close his mind to the undoubted fact that the Jesus presented in the Gospels was a great Free Thinker in his period and country. Set him over against his contemporaries the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Scribes, and Chief Priests, as displayed in the same gospels, and how boldly, originally, daringly, and independently, his mind moves. Again and again he challenges and reverses the received thought of his day: "Ye have heard it said . . . But I say unto you . . ." and in every case it is the process of his own mind that challenges received authority.

If Jesus never lived and is a mere myth, a literary creation, then he was in many attributes the expression of the great free-thinking mind that "made him up" (as children say) and in recognizing him for what he was, a genuine Freethinker, we salute his creator.

That this Freethinking Figure has been made into an Authoritarian and used by priests and prelates to inhibit freethinking (as well as to propagate every idea that he hated and denounced) is a world-tragedy—but if Freethinkers to-day find themselves fighting to liberate men's minds from this prostitute pseudo-Christianity that worships Mammon and Moloch in the name of the crucified Jewish tramp-teacher, they should not let that make them forget the free-thinking quality of Christ.

Indeed, just as professing Christians have forgotten (if they ever knew) the lessons of that Christianity which Jesus is said to have taught by the Gospels, so even Freethinkers are apt to forget that Freethought itself is, and must be, entirely *free* thought not confined within any boundaries, not even the boundaries of orthodox free-thought. For my own part, tolerance, of whatever an individual's free-thinking in any sphere may lead him to, seems to me the very life of free-thought. If it leads mankind to a god-belief or a no-belief, if it leads a man into wisdom or folly, or if it leads him to the right or to the wrong, I think it is still better for humanity that free-thought should be its guiding star. Let us be our true selves, let us be what we are and what we are intended to be, though the Heavens fall. Both here and hereafter it is only we that can save ourselves. For "no man can deliver his brother" and indeed who that is just and fearless wants to purchase his own good by another's sacrifice or harm?

That, by the way, has always seemed to me the intolerable immorality of the cardinal doctrine of Christian faith as taught to-day: that it affects to buy your, and my, salvation and eternal life at the cost of Christ's torture and bloodshed. What honest and brave man would not prefer damnation and eternal death before being so dishonestly "saved"?

Such is the philosophy of Freethinking—at any rate of one mind's free-thinking.

C. G. L. DU CANN

## The Non-Christian Evidence for Jesus

MR. CUTNER's article in the *Freethinker* of March 10 sets up several Aunt Sallies for the purpose of knocking them down. He refers to "many very reverent Rationalists or Agnostics" who "get angry if their Jesus, whom they designate, as a rule, as a Man—with a capital M— . . . is declared to be a myth," who set up "a Great Man, a Wonderful Teacher" for our admiration, who "go into raptures over the Christian Deity," spell Him with a capital H, and so on. Mr. Cutner rightly stigmatizes this as very absurd behaviour.

But who are these Rationalists and Agnostics? He names none. Personally I have never met any who indulged in this "very reverent" behaviour. I believe there have been none since Matthew Arnold and Renan, and they died a long time ago. Mr. Cutner's flagellation of their ghosts is the more redundant since, as he truly says, it does not matter to Freethinkers whether a Jesus existed or not.

The evidence on the positive side is ably assembled by Dr. Robert Eisler, in his work, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, published in 1931. Eisler cannot be accused of Christian prejudice, since he is a learned Jew; and whether we accept his conclusions or not, we must admire the industry with which he masses his material. He enumerates the following non-Christian authorities for the existence of Jesus.

1. In the *Talmud* we read that a rabbi named Eliezer related to the celebrated Aquiba (fl. A.D. 110-132) a dispute he had had with Jacob of Kephars Sekhanjah, a disciple of Jesus the Nasorean, on the interpretation of a text in Deuteronomy. In the dispute Jacob quoted a saying of his master Jesus disparaging to the temple and priesthood of Jerusalem. It is not a saying recorded in the Gospels, and no Christian writer quotes it. The point is that in the Talmudic passage Eliezer cites it as the remark of a real person, made to a man he himself knew.

2. The Roman historian Tacitus (about 120 A.D.) in his *Annals* says that the Christians, "a class hated for their abominations," were named after Christus, who "suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilatus." It has been urged against this (1) that the *Annals* are a forgery of Poggio Bracciolini, an Italian scholar of the fifteenth century. Their genuineness is proved, however, by their agreement in detail with coins and inscriptions discovered since Poggio's time.

(2) That, granting the *Annals* to be genuine, this passage is a forgery. But surely a Christian forger would have given the Christians a better character! (3) That, granting the passage to be genuine, Tacitus merely retailed what he picked up from Christians. But this is most unlikely. Tacitus was a Roman of position who had held public office, had access to official records, and despised and loathed the Christians.

3. Sossianus Hierocles (fl. under Diocletian, 284-305 A.D.) governor of several Roman provinces in succession, wrote a book against Christianity which has perished, but which we know from references in Lactantius. According to Hierocles, Jesus was leader of a band of nine hundred men who committed robberies, and were put down by the Jewish authorities. This is not likely to have been invented by a Christian, though it might, of course, have been invented by a Jew. It is noteworthy that the Jewish *Toldoth Jeshu* makes Jesus leader of more than two thousand armed bandits; but this is a much later production than the work of Hierocles.

Eisler lists other authorities, which can only be mentioned here. Pliny's report to the Emperor Trajan (112 A.D.) on the trials of Christians who shipped Christ as a god goes for nothing on the histori-

city issue. Certain *Acts of Pilate* published in 311 A.D., by the last persecuting Emperor, Maximinus Daia, to discredit Christianity, and mentioned by Eusebius, are given some prominence by Eisler, but were probably a forgery. It is a mistake to think that Christians were the only people who could forge! The greater part of Eisler's work is devoted to the analysis of a Slavonic text of Josephus' *Jewish War*, dating from the thirteenth century. Eisler claims to show, by a minute examination of the text, that it was translated from an Aramaic original, that that original enshrined the genuine work of Josephus, and that it contained a credible account of the doings of Jesus. All will agree that this text of Josephus is a remarkable document. According to it, Jesus was a Messianic pretender who rose against the Romans under Pilate and succeeded in entering Jerusalem, but was arrested and crucified out of hand. The superstructure, however, which Eisler builds on this document is so speculative that I, at any rate, prefer to leave it out of account. We are reduced, therefore, to the *Talmud*, Tacitus and Hierocles for such non-Christian evidence as we have of the existence of a Jesus.

That evidence is not conclusive. It proves at most that at the beginning of the second century A.D., the general opinion of Jewish rabbis and Roman officials was that the Christian trouble had originated with an individual Christ or Messiah. It is remarkable that none of them seems to have regarded Jesus as a figment. We can at least suspend judgment and go on weighing the evidence. The presence of *both* a historical and a mythical element in the story is not impossible.

But certain rash generalizations are to be avoided. A story is not necessarily mythical because it contains miraculous elements. The *Iliad* is crammed full of gods and goddesses, miracles and impossibilities. Hence a century ago critics were explaining the Trojan War as a sun myth. We know to-day that there was a Troy and a Trojan War. Also, a person is not necessarily a myth because he is worshipped as a god. Most of the Roman Emperors were deified. The Mikado of Japan is a god. But historians of two thousand years hence will err if they conclude that there were no Mikados and no Roman Emperors.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

### Obituary

WILLIAM WHITEHOUSE

WE regret to record the death of William Whitehouse, who after a long illness passed away on March 18, 1941. He was an old and respected member of the Birmingham Branch. He was cremated at the Perry Barr Crematorium, and a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. F. Terry.

### 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, Professor G. E. G. Catlin, M.A., Ph.D.—"The New Philosophy and the New Order: The Meaning for Society."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—Annual General Meeting and Social will be held in the "Lamb and Flag," 24 James Street, Oxford Street, on Saturday, March 29. Reception 6 p.m. Meeting 6.30. Social 7.15. Members and friends invited.

COUNTRY  
INDOOR

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate) : 3.0, Professor Robert Peers, M.A., of University College, Nottingham—A Lecture.

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (47 Thurscoe Road, two doors below the Rink) : 7.0, Mr. Burden—"The Significance of the Present Conflict."

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