

# THE FREETHINKER

EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN

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## CONTENTS

Are the Clergy Honest ... ..	261
This Freewill Business ... ..	263
Acid Drops ... ..	264
To Correspondents ... ..	265
Sugar Plums ... ..	265
Freedom and Power ... ..	266
Russian Literature ... ..	267
The Dutch Apostle of Liberal Culture ... ..	268

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Are the Clergy Honest?

THE "Freethinker" is read by many Christians: by some who occupy the pulpit and by many who distinguish themselves from Christians in a general way by explaining that they reject all the churches but believe in "true" Christianity. I think this last term describes a number of quite amiable individuals with enough clarity of mind to see the foolishness of Christianity as exhibited in its historic documents, but who lack the strength definitely to break with their social circle. I say this in no jeering spirit, but as a sober statement of fact. It is not easy for an individual to break with his social, and perhaps family, circle and to feel that a wall is being built up between himself and his hitherto friends. That man is not built to live alone is scientifically true: not merely with regard to sex relationship, but as concerns the whole of his nature. Men are nothing in themselves. It is man who, in the story of evolution, emerges as a continuous historic being carrying in his whole nature the product of uncountable generations.

This by the way. What I have in mind is several letters I have received of late—with many in the past—complaining that I often deal with the clergy as a whole in a very harsh manner. I do not plead guilty to this charge and therefore have no need for extenuation. But there may be need for explanation; and as I write to be understood, this may be given.

Let us set aside at once those simple-minded and simple-natured clergymen who genuinely believe in a real Christianity: the historic Christianity that is presented to us in official doctrines. This Vicar of Wakefield kind of parson still exists, but in decreasing numbers. I do not grant the existence of this type for argumentative purposes, but as a mere statement of fact. No organisation or movement can exist that is wholly composed of hypocrites or rogues. A fraudulent trading company usually limits its rascality to the board of directors; and an outworn religion, in order to exist, must have a large number of sincere believers. I do not, therefore, deny the existence of a very large number of sincere believers in real Christianity in both the pulpit and the pew. My philosophy of religion would be strangely "cock-eyed" if this were not the case. What I am concerned with is the dishonesty and hypocrisy that is and must accompany the functioning of religion in a modern environment.

And we must remember this fact. Christianity comes before the world as a revealed religion—that is, a religion that has been communicated by God to man. It is not on the level of a treatise on ethics or government, or even on that of a scientific theory. In all these cases the possibility of error is admitted and the right to recast a theory or to discard a stated hypothesis is taken as a matter of course. The man who will not act in this manner is not praised for his "faith"; he is put on one side as a fool. But the Churches have always claimed—some, like the Roman Church, in an extreme form (and which claims as its followers half the Christian world) and the other Churches more hesitantly—that man must believe in the god-inspired Bible. The existence of a "sacred" book, which the Christian Church gave the world, is one of the greatest curses that ever settled on mankind. That more than anything else contributes to the hypocrisy and humbug that is so rife in modern religious circles. It has, to use Arnold's expression, hung round the necks of Christians like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea.

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### Christianity and Life

I recall that some years ago a religious paper published an article, which attracted considerable attention, entitled "Are the Clergy Honest Men?" The article was aimed at Bishop Barnes (still in office) and Dean Inge (now retired). The article said quite plainly that if these two preachers did not believe in the truth of the Bible they should retire; but instead of this they remained in office, drawing at least a comfortable salary in the name of one who had nowhere to lay his head. But they did do that. Dr. Inge bluntly declared that historic Christianity was killed by the Copernican astronomy; but the "emoluments" of that religion, and the use of substantially the same language and the same prayer books, accompanied by adequate salaries, continued. There really is something in Karl Marx's comment that the English Church would sooner give up 38 parts of its 39 articles than surrender one thirty-ninth of its income. If a man does not believe in the truth of historic Christianity, then he surely cannot be justified in preaching. To give the term Christianity a new meaning will not do. Christianity is an historic creed: it involves certain specific beliefs; and if these are not true, then Christianity is not true. If the belief in the inspiration of the Bible; if such things as the virgin birth, miracles, vicarious sacrifice, an eternal hell and heaven, etc.—if these things are not true, then Christianity is not true. It is not a case of seeing what Christianity may be made to mean; it is entirely one of asking what historic Christianity did mean. That is a clear and simple issue. I have never yet come across a clergyman who has had the ability and the courage to deal with it.

A religion which men are eternally reinterpreting—a "divine message" giving one meaning to-day and another to-morrow—must inevitably result in hypocrisy and intolerance, a readiness to grasp at any means of perpetuating its power and a sanctified untruthfulness. Above all, it becomes poorer in



intellect and in character. It is bound to fish in the poorest waters for sustenance. Anyone who compares the character of leading Christian clergymen to-day with those of the pre-evolutionary period will find evidence in support of what has just been said. The old gibe that the fool of the family was destined for the Church has lost its sting; it has become too much of a commonplace.

In some instances the professional interest of the clergy of all denominations in opposing certain movements is avowed. British legislation concerning Sunday entertainments was originally, and honestly, based on purely religious grounds. As with very ancient peoples, we had a "taboo" day: in our case "Sunday"; with the Jew Saturday, with the Mohammedan Friday, and so forth. When this reason for a Sabbath began to lose strength it was suddenly discovered that the churches—which had remained unalarmed at women and children working in coal pits or being murdered in the cotton factories, and men working 14 hours a day for a few shillings per week—became fearful that Sunday entertainments would rob the working man of his day of rest. With the breakdown of this plea, the clergy have come back to their original professional reason: "Sunday entertainments would lead to a lessening in Church attendance." No money-grabbing concern could push professional interests in front of social considerations more brazenly than the clergy have done in this statement; and, if people decline to go to Church, it must be made as difficult as possible for them to go anywhere else.

Let me take another point. We are engaged in the greatest struggle this nation has ever undertaken. It is veritably a struggle for existence. Other wars ending against us would have meant a little rearrangement of the map, a tax to pay an indemnity, a blow at our national pride; but we should have remained a self-governing people, with a constitution that enabled us to effect whatever change we pleased in the country in which we live. To lose this war means nothing more nor less than slavery for all who are permitted to live. The general body of the public responded well to the situation and was ready to sacrifice much to beat off the danger that fronted us. But how many have reflected on the fact that German security was largely secured by the clerical opposition to any friendly co-operation with a country that had formally removed religion from its schools and had pronounced itself Atheistic. Right up to the last moment of what was called "peace" the general cry among the clergy was "Nothing to do with an Atheistic country." German agents were petted, entertained, Hitler was accepted and praised because he stood, it was thought, as a bulwark against the spread of Atheism. Church papers, with an exception here and there, raved that a Christian country could have no friendly relations with a country that had "Banished God." There were, of course, other factors in operation. I am now concerned with one only.

Men and women saw in the war a life-and-death struggle for existence. The Church saw in it an opportunity for aggrandisement. The Archbishops led the way by declaring that we were at war for "Christian civilisation"; sometimes "civilisation" was omitted and it was a war for "Christianity." There is no such thing as Christian civilisation. There is a civilisation which derives from Rome and Greece and other sources, but there is none that derives from Christianity. There is a civilisation that has had in its midst the Christian religion; and, bearing that in mind, we can understand the witch-mania, the suppression of freedom of speech, the opposition to

scientific discoveries and so forth that took place under Christianity. But there never has been a Christian civilisation. No society could persist in it.

The war has been exploited in other ways beside that of telling the different religions represented in the armed Forces, and the large number who have no religion at all, the deliberate lie that they are fighting for Christianity. There is the influence of religion in the constant bullying and controlling of men who join the Forces to take a religious oath and to declare themselves members of one of the Churches. The compulsory church parade, probably the most generally hated part of a soldier's life, is persisted in; and if, after parading, a man refuses to enter the Church, or even when excused from the parade, he is met with something very like a punishment for daring to exhibit self-respect where religion is concerned. We have had from the clergy not a single protest against this. On the contrary, we have shoals of lying reports about the thankfulness men feel for their "padres" and the religious services provided. To the clergy the war has been mainly another opportunity for perpetuating their religion and to strengthen their influence.

\* \* \*

### The Plot Against the Schools

Just over 70 years ago the established Church was beaten in its desire to see the State religion enforced in all State schools. Ever since it has been fighting as publicly as it dared to keep the State schools at as low a level as they could, since the rising cost of a higher standard of education meant a greater expenditure in its own sectarian establishments. For some time there have been—sometimes furtive, sometimes open—attempts to regain clerical control, as there was once, over the education of this country. The clergy saw in the war an opportunity to achieve their end. Conferences were held, comprising representatives of all the Churches, for the purpose of forming a plan that would wipe out the 1871 Education Act so far as religious instruction was concerned. The plan, probably with the agreement of members of the Government to this end, is that religion, instead of being optional, is to be compulsory. Instead of the religious lesson being given before or after the secular education lessons, it is to permeate the whole of the school. Religion is to be one of the subjects which may count in a teacher getting his certificate; and religion must also come under the inspectors for examination. It is, of course, the Christian religion that is to be so treated. All that is to be left of the 1871 religious section is the power of the parent to withdraw a child from religious instruction; and even that is certain to go if this clerical plot succeeds.

It should never be forgotten that the Christian Church has never had any great interest in education as such, but it was always anxious to control whatever education was given. Schools are part of our inheritance from Greece and Rome, and the Christian ones that superseded them were but poor substitutes. Schools for the people there were none. The people could hardly be said to have "emerged" until the 18th century; and when the education of the people as an immediate necessity became an urgent demand—as a product of the French Revolution—and when the growth of nonconformity made dissenters unwilling to trust their children in the hands of the Church of England, the era of popular education began. But this should be remembered: the Churches, of whatever brand, had no real desire for education as such. Then, as now, the aim of the clergy of all denominations was to place the brand of Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc., on the sectarian lambs so that, as sheep, they could be



efficiently and profitably sheared. That is the essence of the position to-day. "We must capture the children and give them a brand that cannot be obliterated." That is the cry of all the Churches—and Hitler.

I can give briefly but one more illustration of my text. For generations historians and Continental observers have noted the cultural defects of the Christian Sunday. The clergy have exhibited their usual changes of attitude in connection with Sunday observance. First it was defended as wholly a "taboo" day, as the Jews have Saturday, the Mohammedans Friday and so forth. Later, when the fetishistic plea grew weak, concern was displayed for the workman's day of rest. Now that this has been protected, mainly by the workman himself, we are back to the more primitive view that God will not permit us to win the war while we desecrate his law by non-observance of the Sabbath. And, again, it is to be noted that the war is being hailed as something that may assist at a religious survival.

There are many more illustrations I could give bearing on the general subject of these notes. At any rate, I think I have given enough to justify my position.

CHAPMAN COHEN

### THIS FREEWILL BUSINESS

BEFORE the bench in his laboratory Jehovah leant back in his chair. He was obviously worried. His forehead appeared to be more heavily lined with wrinkles than usual. A neat label on which the words **Homo sapiens LR1,432,777,908** were printed gave a clue to the source of his bewilderment. "A few more cases like this," he murmured, "and there'll be no more freewill." "What ho, my hearty!" exclaimed the Dove. "Cheer up. I knew this war would trouble you. And this is the bunch that Number Two did his best to save (whatever that may mean) about 2,000 years (a couple of days) ago. I'm willing to concede that the young man did his best. But what a best! Why, at Pentecost—"

"Look here, old pigeon, you're on the wrong tack. The war is nothing to me. What's one more war? I give men and women a free will and this is what comes of it. It isn't my fault. I think, like you, that Number Two missed the boat some way or the other, but it's too late to go into that now. What I don't like is the fact that he has contrived to get all the kudos out of my Scheme. It's Jesus here, Jesus there, and all the attention the old man gets nowadays is the petitioning. Millions of people asking me to help them win the war! How can I, I ask you? When Adam and Eve disobeyed me by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, why didn't they make a meal when they were busy? One miserable apple, and only a bite of that! How can I, I ask you, help them all to win the war. I ask you!" There followed a long spluttering cough.

"No, it isn't this war. It's the case of one William Wryneck. My God, what a name! I've watched him from boyhood. He amused me at first. Even in the cradle he was a contrary lump. One day he'd howl for his bottle every hour, the next day every six hours, the next day he'd refuse milk firmly and smash every bottle presented. You see, William Wryneck had been made by me like everyone else. Into his little bit of plasticine on this very bench went his quota of free will. I think my hand must have shaken in his case. A whole bottleful seems to have gone into his egg. If any creature was differentiated from the bat or the beetle, that man was William Wryneck.

"There were, however, other cases to watch, so I let William run loose for a while. When I looked up his docket at 23 he had been an extraordinary case. His second year at school he had studied furiously, and at the terminal exams. he had been first boy in every subject. Next year he didn't even make a decent show. His papers showed no evidence of having read one of the text-books he was supposed to have studied. As a matter of fact, he'd never opened one of them. He had been charged with stealing

from his companions' lockers and the charges had been proved. There were also cases of astounding generosity on his part—giving up his whole term's allowance in order to stand his class a glorious blow-out. One week he had thrashed the school bully—and thrashed him well—for nothing at all, just because the whim seized him. The next day when Milton Minor clouted him he turned the other cheek. One day his veracity was embarrassing in its simple disinterestedness; the next day he was a prize-medal liar. He had gained the school's special distinction in an Ode to Humanity, and a week after he had been expelled the college. When he left school and started on a life of commerce he had another amazing record. He chose Honesty or Sharp Practice as his guiding rule on different days, and no one could tell at any time which was the role he was playing. He would clear out a client to his last penny by an ingenious trick, and then he would exercise the power of choice and give it him back. Or he would have a month in Paris.

"I thought that if ever there were a case for special attention, this was one. So one day I planted old Daniel Gubbins (you know him). He used to parade the streets carrying a sandwich board. On his chest there appeared a legend, 'The Wages of Sin is Death!' On his back was 'Flee from the Wrath to Come!' I placed him at the exit to the 'Gate and Jampot' when William was retiring ungracefully, and disgracefully drunk. William, as I intended, saw the word 'Wages,' was impressed, and within five minutes was in one of my tabernacles. He exercised his Free Will. He could either have fled from the—('It can't be fled, ghost; what is it?') 'Search me,' said the ghost)—he could either have flowed from the wrath to come or he could have stayed put. He flew. When he went home that night he kissed his wife and gave her a bumper parcel of fish and chips and informed her that he had found Person Number Two. His sins had been washed away and he was a changed man. Grace, in short, had come to Dick Wryneck.

"There was rare goings on for a fortnight. Liza viewed a regenerated husband with mixed feelings. She and the kids appreciated the increased quantity of chips and the absence of the smell of beer. But there were other things she didn't care about. His fervour in more than one way was distinctly embarrassing. Then, as might have been anticipated, William had another chance of exercising his free will. It was in front of the 'Gate and Jampot.' He chose to go in and have a quick one. He rather liked exercising his power of choice. So he chose 18—all more or less quick ones.

"I cannot keep you longer, my Dove. I know you're due at the Keswick Convention in half an hour, and you're particular about combing your feathers. But you cannot imagine the special pains I took with Wryneck. But perhaps you can. But his free will beat me every time. I contrived by a smart trick to get him into the fold of the Plymouth Brethren (which you know is my special sect and for the followers of which I am preparing a special reward). But, hang it all, after a year or two's exemplary conduct (with one or two surprising exceptions), he joined the Christadelphians. The Christadelphians! And now I have just got the news that he has joined the Mormons. That's put the lid on."

"All my sympathies, old chap." This from the Dove. "But if you give 'em free will, you've got to put up with it. Logic is logic, that's all I say."

"That's where you're wrong, Dove. William Wryneck has decided me. Where's that bottle?" The decanter labelled Free Will was emptied into the sink. "And now, Dove, what do you think of that? And **Homines sapientes**, what do **you** think of that, my bucks?"

"And now to my cats, dogs and horses."

T. H. ELSTOB

A Statute in Virginia in 1670 declared that "All servants, not being Christians, imported into this country by shipping, shall be slaves." And it was added, "Conversion to the Christian faith doth not make free."—BANCROFT.



## ACID DROPS

THE Middlesbrough and Darlington District Methodist Church Synod (what a mouthful!) is seriously alarmed at the scanty provision made by the Army for the religious instruction of young soldiers. We do not know what it is this many jointed organisation wants. When a young man joins the Army he is often pressed to set himself down as belonging to one of the Churches, whether he does or does not belong to that particular Church. Then he is watched over by an Army chaplain; he is ordered to church parade, and if he asks to be excused, he often finds himself subjected to something very like punishment. What more do these preachers want?

One complaint made at this meeting was that "when in the Army you mention religion or Christianity—officer or man—they immediately think of a code of ethics and nothing else." Yes, but when these same preachers are arguing in the Press or on the platform all they put forward is a code of ethics. Of course, we know that is all bluff. It is not ethics in which the clergy are interested, but doctrine, and we are pleased to find it confessed that the clergy are not really concerned with morals, but with mere belief in their religion. It is as difficult for even a clergyman to be dishonest **all** the time as it is for ordinary folk. Now and again the truth will out.

The body of a German airman was washed ashore the other day and upon it were found several pictures of the Sacred Heart and of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus. This proves two things, of course. First, that the Nazis are all "pagans," and beastly pagans at that; and second, the marvellous protective power of saintly pictures and relics.

Wales is not taking very kindly to the agitation to hand the schools over to the control of the clergy. The Executive Committee of the Federation of Education Committees for Wales and Monmouthshire have protested against upsetting the existing arrangements in the matter of religious instruction. In this they were following the example of the National Federation of Class Teachers, which called upon the National Union of Teachers to "take effective measures that these efforts shall be made abortive." But will the N.U.T. do this? We doubt it. The union has shown itself very timid of standing up against the clergy. Ordinary trade unionists would have kicked against such a move long ago, but the teachers' trade union is very, very timid where religion is concerned.

Roman Catholics are having it more or less their own way at the moment in this country, but it is good to see some of them get a nasty jolt. The other day a Roman Catholic mother objected in court to her daughter marrying a Protestant—and, even worse, not marrying in a Catholic church. The magistrate called it "a futile objection" and gave his consent to the marriage. This will be enough to make Cardinal Hinsley and his henchmen tremble with horror, for they have been filling columns in Catholic journals with outbursts against "mixed" marriages—among Christians! But, of course, whether a very religious Catholic married to a very religious Protestant means a very happy marriage is quite another question.

We are getting quite fond of the Rev. L. B. Ashby, the gentleman who writes a weekly—(please, Mr. Comp., spell this with a double "e")—article in the "Daily Telegraph" on religion. For instance, we always imagined that a man commanded respect by his personal qualities. Mr. Ashby says no, it is "because Christ took our nature upon himself." What of the myriads of millions of human

beings who lived before Christ was heard of? Or those who have not yet heard of him? Or those who do not bother about him? It is only because of this, says Mr. Ashby, that slavery and Hitlerism are intolerable things. It gets funnier and funnier.

Then Christ gave us the idea of "citizenship in heaven" as a guide for our conduct on earth. Now what is citizenship in heaven? There is no family life in heaven, for we have the authority of Jesus that in heaven there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage, and if husband and wife do meet in heaven there will be nothing more than a "pleased to meet you" and "hope you are well"—no, not that much, because no one will be ill. You just go on living until you long for death as a kind of change. And there will be no politics, or elections, or disputes—nothing at all to which we are accustomed, and if one angel says to another, "Go to hell!" the advice is likely to be met with, "I wish I could; one might meet some very interesting people there."

Finally, Mr. Ashby believes that this idea should make us better citizens on earth. Why? How? To know that we shall have to swim one day will lead to the practice of swimming. To believe that one day French will be the universal language may lead us to learn French. But how does the belief that we shall all go to the Christian heaven make us live better lives on earth? And at any rate, it has not had that effect up to date. It is really surprising that Mr. Ashby is not one of the regular religious lecturers for the B.B.C.

The "Catholic Times" says: "We are fighting for civilisation, culture and Christianity." We congratulate the "Catholic Times" in the separation of Christianity from culture and civilisation. Of course, the editor would retort that the first two are connected with the last-named. With that we should not, of course, agree. But the statement as it runs is certainly more honest than that given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who blandly says that Atheists, Jews, Buddhists, Brahmans and members of other non-Christian creeds are fighting for **Christian** civilisation. That was and is a lie that might well make Goebbels open his eyes. And Goebbels was educated as a Christian, and may be one still for aught we know.

The supernatural power delegated to the Pope and the miraculous power given him appear to have limits. Bruges has the most remarkable relic in the world. It is a few drops of the blood of Jesus—which loses none of its vitality in the passing of the centuries—and is not to be carried through the streets this year. . . This blood is in a golden reliquary, and there is no question of its genuineness. The Church guarantees it. So for the "duration" this particular fraud is out of action.

That peculiar body, the Christian Evidence Society, which might have been Christian but never managed to get any evidence, was addressed at its annual meeting by Archdeacon Crick, a Chaplain of the Fleet. He pointed out with pleasure that in the Navy the King's Regulations "required that every morning the church bell should be tolled, the church pennon hoisted and daily prayers said." We do not consider it fair to saddle the King with the responsibility for this, and indeed he is in no way responsible for it. So let us say that the Church sees to it that men shall everywhere, whether in the Navy or out of it, be brought to religious service whether they want to be there or not. As in the Army, the men of the Navy are forced to parade for religious service, but, if they insisted, they would be permitted to fall out of the praying part. At least, they **ought** to be allowed, but so long as chaplains have their way, there will be plenty of manœuvring to induce men to give up this right.



## TO CORRESPONDENTS

"THE FREETHINKER,"  
(Temporary Address),  
68, FARRINGTON STREET,  
LONDON, E.C.4.

"FREETHINKER" WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Gunner A. Edwards, 30s.; K. Amoaka-Atta (West Africa), 2s. 6d.; H. Johnstone (South Africa), 10s.; F. Muston, 3s. 6d.; W. W. Pearce, 20s.; A. R. Williams, 2s. 10d.; Mrs. Wood, 5s.; A. Hanson, 85s.; "Mary" (Devon), 21s.; Lady Simon, 10s. 6d.; "S. H.," 10s. 6d.; J. Close, 42s.

A. HANSON.—Many thanks for what you say concerning "The 'Freethinker' and the 'Blitz'" article. Also for subscription.

J. CLOSE.—Many thanks for your warm and cheering letter. We know that what help we need will cheerfully be given. But we are not quite sure how we stand at the moment. We are taking as much care as we can in prevailing conditions. Nothing is wrong now. We are, in fact, feeling quite fit and exercising all the care we can.

GUNNER EDWARDS.—Thanks for your flattering appreciation of our services. But a deal of what we are able to do is due to the consciousness that we have many warm friends all over the country and, one may say, the world. That is a tonic all the time, and one that money cannot buy.

DEACON MAY.—We are making inquiries. But we must be quite certain of the facts. At any rate, it is a scandal that anyone joining one of the Armed Forces should be bullied or cajoled into a surrender of his legal rights. It is a pity the person concerned did not inform the N.S.S. directly the trouble began.

D. COULINGLEY.—Mr. Joad's excursions into the fields of religion and ethics are probably part of an elaborate joke he is working off on the public. They are hardly worthy of detailed notice. Only the four first volumes of Mr. Cohen's "Essays in Freethinking" are now available. The fifth was destroyed in the "blitz." The four volumes are being sent to you.

W. COLLINS.—Sorry you were not able to attend the Conference. All things considered, it was a very successful gathering.

Several letters have reached us with regard to the case reported in the Press on May 29.

Guardsmen Ernest J. Whitehead, Grenadier Guards, told a Chelsea court-martial yesterday that when he joined up he was asked his religion and replied that he had none, as he did not believe in religion.

He was put down as Church of England because he thought some religion had to be put down.

The court-martial was for refusing to enter church when on church parade. The findings of the Court will be made known.

We are bearing this matter in mind, but it may be advisable to wait until the verdict of the court-martial is known.

Lecture notices must reach 68, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

## SUGAR PLUMS

THIS is an eight-page issue of the "Freethinker," and it is issued in accordance with the severe restriction placed upon the use of paper by the paper Controller. In future there will be issued one such number each month. Other issues will be as usual. It may be noted that some compensation to readers will be offered in the shape of not using any space for advertisements in the shortened issue.

We have received dozens of letters concerning the "blitz"; if we needed consolation and encouragement we are getting it in liberal measure. Here is one (abridged) from Tunbridge Wells. "Don't worry about paper shortage.

If and when necessary we'll cheerfully pay out a shilling a week for a duplicated sheet of 'Acid Drops,' 'Sugar Plums' and an editorial, and will furthermore send our own sheet of paper each week." "Mary," Devon, writes expressing her relief that it was only inanimate things that were lost in the "blitz," and says, "The 'Freethinker' is needed now more than ever." That is, of course, an opinion with which we cordially agree.

We should like to answer personally all the letters received, but we really have not the time to do so. We may reply later. Our time for writing is always well filled, and now we have had to spend much time at the office and many journeys in the City arranging for this and that to be done. Finally, we can assure all our friends that we are taking all possible care of our health, even to the extravagant use of taxis to save the fatigue of much walking. But **our** war must go on. And that's the end of it.

There is usually a humorous side to disaster if only one can see it. When, the morning after the "blitz," we passed the hole in Farringdon Street where once our offices stood, we saw on the top of the fallen rubble a metal advertisement advertising the "Freethinker." The plate was about 4ft. by 3ft. Thinking it might inform new visitors where we had been, we picked it up and placed it against the wall. A few hours later we found that one of the police had turned the panel with the written "Read the 'Freethinker,'" etc., to the wall and had chalked on the plain side, "This is dangerous!" We think, though, the reference was to the danger of falling masonry—not to this paper.

The 1941 Annual Conference of the N.S.S. was unique in the history of the Society. To begin with it was, with the exception of Mr. Atkinson, who came from Manchester, made up entirely of London members. Next, the branches had agreed that only formal business should be considered, such as the presentation of the annual balance sheet and the election of officials. Third, the unanimous opinion was expressed that all the retiring officials should be re-elected. Fourth, only formal and necessary business could be considered. In the circumstances, no other reasonable plan could have been adopted.

In despite of circumstances, the meeting was good, and not only in point of numbers; everyone was in good spirits and the semi-official discussion of matters of interest to Freethinkers and, beyond, was lively, interesting in both the agreement and disagreement displayed, and the result one that did credit to a body of men and women who not merely call themselves, but were Freethinkers. One could feel legitimate pride in belonging to an organisation the members of which could join so well in collective effort without surrendering individual differences. That spirit does really get things done without the prospect of having what is done to-day pulled down to-morrow.

The subjects discussed were the dangerous policy of suppressing newspapers even in times of war, without a public statement of the offence committed and without the right of appeal to a Court of Law; methods of counteracting the intolerable and intolerant religious advocacy of the B.B.C.; the revocation of the power of local authorities to permit Sunday theatrical performances and the scandalously open way in which members of Parliament were threatened into refraining from resisting an adverse vote and other matters. The discussions reached as high a level as subject that has ever been discussed at a Conference. The Executive's annual report will be printed in our next issue.

We have to thank those who have written us with offers of books, either by purchase or otherwise, to replace the Editor's loss—the only feature of the catastrophe that has given him serious concern. They are gleanings of many years, and some will not be easily replaced. Will those who have written be good enough to hold them in hand for a while until we move into new premises.



## FREEDOM AND POWER

SECTION 3 (continued from page 259)

WHILE intellectual freedom and political independence are essential to each other, and must rest for security and exercise on a positive *jus civile*, mental emancipation from the toils of a proscriptive theocracy is the later consummation. In England, the movement previously noted met with a temporary setback through reactions and passions incited by the French revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. But the battle was rejoined by sturdy protagonists of every rank, and by the mid-century this country may be said to have reached the position acclaimed by Tennyson (when the rough road had been trod):—

"The Land where girt by friend or foe,  
A man may speak the things he wills!"

The popular side of hostility to critical unbelief may have its roots in that aspect of Faith which stresses Eternal Life to the believer. Here scepticism is negative. Those who cling to that hope which touches human affections ("We shall meet beyond the river") are wounded by critical doubt. . . . On the other hand, a widespread scepticism as to its truth among the public to-day, as the core of the doctrine, leads to that general indifference to religious observance and controversy which is widest. This has a bearing on critical propaganda itself which is in danger of becoming a contest between those who strongly hold to Faith and those who strongly oppose it, with the outside world simply shrugging its shoulders. . . . There are wide cultural interests of free inquiry beyond these limits—cosmic, scientific—in which some at least of this public are interested; with numerous problems awaiting investigation or possible solution.

The principle of Authority carries a relation to a free polity also, alike on its mental and political side, but distinct from and antithetical to that of the old régimes.

An atmosphere of unrestricted inquiry is no guarantee that truth and sanity in all things will necessarily prevail. If sense appears there is full scope for nonsense and the display of human limitations. But it affords, to repeat, opportunity for Truth and sanity to emerge in a general *mêlée* of conflicting opinion in every sphere of interest and activity—the expansion and critical testing of knowledge. So, too, in the field of material well-being, a constant concern from the nature of things of the body politic, Liberty is not to be identified, as such, with any particular panacea or nostrum advanced to this end. It provides conditions simply for the best possible line of approach to be evolved or projected. Parliament, again, properly does not govern *per se*. It supports a Government taken, broadly, from a majority of its members. It involves, in action, a compromise between personal independence and faculty for judicious co-operation. The State must not be disintegrated: "The King's Government must be maintained." The common weal is paramount over all sectional interests.

Then, beyond the Administrative State—which presents in the practical application of these principles a sufficiently complex task—lies the spiritual being of a country like England (or France before her fall), with a thousand years of historic tradition and growth that has gone to its making. A unique language, literature, achievement in the industrial arts, a social code—a way of life congenial to the temperament of its commonalty irrespective of creed

or political distinctions: whence springs that love of country, "This England—," which makes any idea of its submergence under an alien usurpation an impossible fatality. To the citizen, therefore, falls the high duty to hold its sanctuary unprofaned; to the State, the provision of every form of training and equipment by air, sea and land essential to its puissant performance.

Liberty is a supreme gain, wrested by conquest from a hostile world—and the battle is yet joined. Its service and maintenance call for the highest human attributes. Her champions must be ever ready armed *cap-à-pie* to speak with the enemy in the gate—from whatever quarter he comes.

During the period we have reviewed, life in the West was emerging from the chaos left by barbaric inroads and migrations; with the fall of Rome, new elements were appearing on the ruin of the Imperial system. Principalities and kingdoms of uncertain tenure and shifting boundaries were arising to become the precursors of organic countries: such as France, Spain, Hungary, Bohemia. What is known as the "feudal system" provided the principal force of social cohesion in a dangerous time. The Roman Church was steadily setting the seal of its theocratic sovereignty on the whole. As the medieval world took form and substance, about the 12th century, as Christendom, under its authoritarian supernaturalism few types of free institutions were to be found therein; little corresponding to the contemporary English development. Something of the kind appeared later: in the turbulent republics of Italy—Florence, Genoa; in certain free cities of Germany and the Low Countries. With the stirrings of fresh activity following the Crusades—the upgrowth of universities and eagerness for knowledge, revived interest in Greek thought; novel arts and crafts in response to demands of a more civilised tenor—there comes the general promise of better things. But the cold, constrictive hand of Romanism lay on mental enthusiasm and curiosity with the Inquisition terror to aid further her closed front.

Disruptive factors began to operate in the 15th and 16th centuries with the opening given to enterprise by geographical discovery. The Reformation upheaval and wars dislocated Catholic power, and with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which closed temporarily the armed struggle, there is ushered in our modern world. Between then and 1700 the English movement, as we saw, had issued in a degree of civil and religious liberty. The founding of the Royal Society in 1663 gave a great impetus to the pursuit of "natural knowledge" and science went forward in several of the more advanced countries. The Copernican cosmology dissolved medieval fantasies, while the circumnavigation of the globe revealed to the West for the first time its real extent and position. Yet direct religious scepticism was still a dangerous indulgence; most Governments remained autocratic, and English policy abroad was mainly directed during the early 18th century in defeating a revived Catholic hegemony in Europe under Louis XIV. The autonomous British colonies along the Atlantic seaboard were growing in strength and prosperity; mercantile and colonial expansion elsewhere put Britain on the map. But a bitter struggle for mental emancipation continued, particularly in France, which, under the pressure of futile wars, financial and internal trouble, headed for the abyss.

We pass here the catastrophic era that followed, on which much partisan history has been written from all sides. Beyond the "equalitarian" system bequeathed



by Napoleon it had small effect at the time on the cause of freedom. It was rather its aftermath, when the tumult had subsided—the feelings it excited, the slogans it had proclaimed persisting after the attempted resettlement of Europe by a Congress of Vienna and the like—that influenced subsequent reactions.

The battle was renewed through the popular upheaval which disturbed the Continent in the mid-century last and affected nearly every country. Its immediate result was failure, with a few exceptions; but other things emerged. It coincided with great nationality movements in Germany, Italy, Austro-Hungary. So a number of large States succeeded, autocratic in principle, but with this concession to popular feeling: that parliaments and elected councils were set up as an expression of public opinion, though without control over the policy of the Executive Government. And as one form of liberty tends to incite to others, a general freedom of intellectual inquiry and scientific research came in its train; so by the end of last century a degree of emancipation and illumination had been won surpassing any previous epoch, though one most unwelcome to the fortress of Night as dayspring flooded the mountain tops . . .

Storm clouds, however, began again to gather along the horizon.

AUSTEN VERNEY

(To be concluded)

### RUSSIAN LITERATURE

FROM the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century the established founts of Occidental art forms were Italy and France, with England, the Germanic States, Spain and the Low Countries as principal subsidiaries. The country which eventually—and spectacularly—augmented these founts was—Russia. The background and circumstances which led to this augmentation are interesting.

During the 1700's the Russians, living so far east of the Vistula as to be considered semi-Oriental, were gradually building for themselves, on the foundations laid by Peter the Great, European modes of life and thought. This structure, rude at first, grew progressively more decorative until, in the middle of the nineteenth century, there appeared artistic facets so scintillating and distinctive that intellectual coteries in Europe proper (they were beginning to call themselves "intelligentsia") were at a loss for words sufficiently expressive of their adulation. The wave of Russophilism that followed is still remembered by many living people.

Literature, music and, later, ballet were the media in which the newcomers best distinguished themselves. (Painting and the visual arts generally, for some reason, were not commensurably enriched). The names of the Russian masters in these arts are too well-known to need repetition here. Suffice it to say that their works, characterised on the technical side by a certain grandeur coupled with a fondness for detail, and on the emotional side by a range and an impulsive seriousness exotic to the mainstream of Western art, were enthusiastically read, listened to and watched by "everyone."

To become less general, let us consider literature. The heyday of Russophilism now being passed, we are the better able to assess the worth of the responsible writers. The first, and enormously significant, point to note is that some four or five Russians are now normally mentioned in the same breath as that which names the most renowned English writers. Tolstoy and his fellows are already classics. How significant, how indeed startling, this fact is, is related to the youthfulness of Russian literature. To us English, inheritors of a 600-year-old literary tradition, it is a startling reflection that the very language used by the great Russian authors is still only 200 years old. And it is an invented language: it was deliberately fabricated by M. K. Lomonosov out of the best parts of colloquial Russian and

"Church Slavonic." The first writer to use this new language with distinction was the poet Pushkin, born in 1799. Recall for a moment the states of development of the three main literatures in 1799; recall that Goethe was 50, that Burns had been dead three years and that Voltaire was already becoming a legendary figure.

Using then a new and factitious medium and heirs to no literary tradition, Pushkin and his even more famous votaries compiled a unique chapter in the encyclopædia of literature, and all subsequent chapters have in greater or lesser degree been influenced by it. To the art of novel writing, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Turgenev made cardinal contributions. Their books, full but never prolix, are astonishingly realistic. Many of their characters indulge in self-analyses of thought and conduct never before attempted on paper. But more important is the ever-present atmosphere of dissatisfaction with contemporary society.

Czarist Russia of last century was in even greater need of reform than were the Western communities. Europeanisation of what was essentially a feudal state had given birth to a social system in which the diseases of both parents were dominant. A despotic monarchy, a hedonistic aristocracy and a corrupt and powerful Church between them held the miserable and apathetic majority of the people in tyrannical subjection. Graft and malversation flourished throughout the land. Here, in other words, were the banes of the Western communities magnified and distended, and it is not therefore surprising that the more intelligent writers should come to criticise their own social environment and the whole civilisation of which it happened to be a part. They wanted to know what the individual could do about it all. They sought to define new standards of Right and Wrong against which conduct might be measured.

The English translations of the great nineteenth century Russian novels, of which "Crime and Punishment" and "Anna Karenina" are only two of the more notable, provided strange contrasts to the current domestic novels, usually romantic and sometimes decorously satirical. Dickens, it is true, exposed many unsavoury features of English life, but his understanding of crime and dissoluteness is jejune compared with Dostoevsky's. And Thackeray, it is equally true, narrowed the conventional gap between Good people and Bad people in fiction, but in "Anna Karenina" there is not a suggestion of the existence of such a gap; there are just—people, people with an infinite variety of temperaments which, conditioned by prevailing circumstances, determine behaviour.

These books, I have already stated, influenced modern English literature. And modern Russian literature? What relation this has to the pro-Revolutionary era and how much the peculiar common denominator of the old literature has been affected by the new dispensation, are questions which, not having read any representative modern works, I cannot answer. I write "representative" in order to exclude those of the recently deceased Maxim Gorky, whom I regard—perhaps, I admit, inaccurately, for I have not read a great deal of his work—as a much more objective writer than his great predecessors, as essentially a brilliant and sympathetic reporter of the Russian scene.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN

(To be concluded)

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

#### LONDON

##### Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.0, MR. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.0, MR. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 7.30, Thursday, MR. E. C. SAPHIN. Sunday, 6.0, MR. E. PAGE.

##### Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): A Lecture.

#### COUNTRY

##### Outdoor

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound): 7.30, MR. F. SMITHIES.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Market Place): 7.30, MR. J. W. BARKER.



## THE DUTCH APOSTLE OF LIBERAL CULTURE

THE part performed by Erasmus in the cause of liberation has been very diversely interpreted. He has been accused of apostacy and desertion by the Protestants and as the purveyor of pestilent heresies by Catholics. But the gentle humanist was always more solicitous for the restoration of ancient Greek and Roman literature than concerned with the sectarian squabbles of the Reformation period. And as Thomas Huxley once inquired, Why should an earnest humanist spoil his spoon in other people's gravy? There is still a widespread belief that "Erasmus laid the eggs and Luther hatched the chickens," despite the humanist scholar's protest to his contemporaries that he had laid an egg while "Luther hatched a bird of quite a different breed."

That the early writings of Erasmus deeply impressed Luther is indisputable; but when the humanist displayed his critical powers in the amendment of received renderings of the Bible, Luther, who was a pronounced Bibliolater, began to lose faith in his mentor. In a letter of 1517, composed after the appearance of Erasmus' notes on the New Testament, Luther declared: "I read our Erasmus and my respect for him daily increases. He pleases me because, constantly and learnedly, he convicts and condemns monks and priests of inveterate sloth and ignorance; yet I fear he does not sufficiently reveal Christ and the grace of God . . . for human considerations prevail with him much more than divine."

Erasmus can scarcely be regarded as the Voltaire of the Renaissance. Sceptical as his nature undoubtedly was, the utmost wariness was essential to all who exhibited independence of opinion in matters trenching on the domains of theology. A heinous crime was heresy, and the Inquisition was ever anxious to convict and punish with torture and burning alive anyone guilty of entertaining, much less expressing, heterodox views. Thus, Erasmus was careful to seek and secure the protection of influential friends, while his repeated wanderings were partly due to the advisability of migration from one place to another when danger became too great.

The Vulgate—the Latin version of the Bible ascribed to Jerome—had long been venerated as a standard text. Erasmus compared one copy with another and was startled by the striking variations he discovered. It is thought that Lorenzo Valla's "Notes on the New Testament," composed about 1450, formed the first rationalist criticism of the Vulgate. Then, under Papal auspices, an abortive attempt was made to correct its numerous errors. Other investigators continued the inquiry until, at last, Erasmus undertook the task.

In his scholarly and dispassionate study of "Erasmus" (Harper), Professor Preserved Smith states that Valla's "Notes," as yet unprinted, were found by Erasmus in an Abbey near Louvain. "Though he knew that to publish such an attack on the Vulgate would be attended with no little risk, he did so, with a preface that is mainly an apology for his temerity. . . . With this initiation into biblical criticism we see the unfolding of a new spirit. Sick and tired of the old glosses, the interminable subtleties that seemed beside the point, the age had at last found something fresh, the Bible treated in the spirit of Quintilian, not as an oracular riddle, but as a piece of literature. It was the sceptic Valla that first disclosed the true sound method of exegesis, and thus uncovered the long hidden meaning. . . . And Erasmus was the man to perceive the value of the new treasure and set it in a blaze of brilliants."

As the notorious passage in John, "For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost," was missing in the various Greek MSS. he consulted, Erasmus deleted it in his rendering. Dr. Smith notes that this passage is an interpolation "first quoted and perhaps introduced by Priscillian (A.D. 380) as a pious fraud to convince doubters of the doctrine of the Trinity." Yet, for this omission Erasmus was vindictively assailed; so in defence he truly stated that the Vatican Codex does not contain it, but that if one Greek manuscript could be found bearing the passage he would reinsert it. The required document soon came to light in Trinity College, Dublin; but Dr. Smith considers that there is every probability that "it was manufactured entire for the express purpose." Erasmus shrewdly suspected its genuineness, although he printed the forgery in his third edition so "that there be no occasion for calumny." Thus the spurious passage was added to the Greek rendering and so remained until recent times. Luther rejected the interpolation in his German Bible, but it was restored after the Reformer's death. Dr. Smith observes that "It is still retained as a proof-text in Protestant creeds, while the Roman Catholic Congregation of the Index has forbidden any question of its authenticity."

Two other early interpolations were detected by Erasmus: the concluding twelve verses of Mark's Gospel and the story of the woman taken in adultery in John. Erasmus, however, very prudently retained these passages in his text, while candidly noting the doubtful character of the verses in Mark and that the adultery episode was missing in the more reliable MSS.

T. F. PALMER

(To be concluded)

## OBITUARY

### FREDERICK HENRY CURTICE

The remains of Frederick Henry Curtice were interred in the Bromley Hill Cemetery, Kent, on Thursday, May 22. After a period of poor health, death took place on May 19, in his 75th year. A Freethinker of many years' standing, he helped the Movement in many ways and never missed an opportunity to bring the Freethought point of view to the uninitiated. He retained his Freethought principles to the end and his wish for a Secular Service was duly honoured, the service being conducted at the graveside by the General Secretary N.S.S. R. H. R.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE PHOENIX

SIR,—Phoenix-like, the "Freethinker" has risen from its ashes. When I read the May 18 issue of the paper I feared that I might never again have the pleasure of perusing its columns, and of meeting on paper the delightful and refreshing company of Mr. Cohen, Mr. Elstob, Mr. Cutner, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Palmer and all the rest. I was therefore all the more delighted when I saw this week's issue, which was the old journal come to life again.

I am sending half-a-guinea as a small token of what I owe to the "Freethinker." Your columns and those of the "Literary Guide" have long been my standing help in time of trouble. It must be a good ten years since I first contributed to the "Freethinker" as a struggling young writer. Now, with about fifteen books and literally hundreds of articles to my name, I retain a real affection for the paper.

May it go on from strength to strength!

JOHN ROWLAND