

# THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Just Words

I HAD been trying to make clear to a friend a certain position, and also criticising the use of leading words in a misleading manner. As is usual in such circumstances, the retort came that I was just "splitting hairs." Really I was not splitting hairs, only combing them out, removing excrescencies, things that had no right there. This kind of treatment is not usually met with delight, but I do not think that a patient who has just had a gangrenous limb cut away feels immediately thankful to the surgeon, whatever feelings he may have later. Surgical operations, whether verbal or material, are not things that are warmly welcomed.

I suppose I got this fondness for weighing words in my early years, and I recall a retort by George Henry Lewes—one of the most fruitful thinkers of his time—when he was accused of quarrelling about words. He inquired: "What else is there to quarrel about?" There is not, after all, very much profit in an afternoon tea-party where everybody agrees with everyone else and a confirmation of prejudices is accepted as the equivalent of demonstrated truths. Movement in a circle is not progress. After all, words—when we are not holding a religious service or conducting a political campaign—imply meanings, meanings indicate frames of mind, and it is on the validity and utility of frames of mind that controversies turn. If everyone used words with precisely the same meanings there would be few occasions for disputes.

We may well doubt whether language was invented to conceal thought, but there can be no doubt that words are often used to confuse it. Consider a political candidate declaring that he believes in this or that because he is concerned with the welfare of the country. The intention here is to induce the feeling that any opposed opinion must be against the well-being of the people. The Baldwin and Chamberlain Governments justified their substantial encouragement to Hitlerism by informing the public that they hated war and loved peace. Cardinal Hinsley and the Archbishop of Canterbury tell us that they love truth. But so far as their religion is concerned what they love is a stated doctrine, and what they hate is that anyone should question the truth of their religious teachings and demand evidence before they are accepted. To them a doubter is a potential "sinner," not one who may have the capacity for pointing out where both churchmen are wrong. What they and their kind say

is "We love truth." What they mean is "We love what we say because we say it." The two propositions are not of necessity identical.

There is another reason that will justify a quarrel about words. John Stuart Mill pointed out that the user of familiar phrases has a decided advantage over he who uses new ones, or applies old ones in a new way. Note the solemnity of a Christian saying "For Jesus Christ's sake, Amen." The reaction to this is set. But "Jesus" is the Greek equivalent for the Jewish Joshua, and it is certain that "For Joshua's sake, Amen" would rouse nothing but a smile. Put "Moses" instead of Jesus and the reaction would be more marked. All new ideas suffer from this handicap, but religion suffers most because religious ideas refer more clearly to a bygone state of culture. Thought is impossible without language, but of necessity language lags behind thought. This is the difficulty that faces every scientific thinker, and it is partly for this reason mathematical symbols are increasingly used in advanced science. But religion is fundamentally anthropomorphic, it can be intellectually alive only in the most primitive stages of human culture.

### What is God?

The other day I had occasion to refer to a book published a few years back with the title of "God." One might have thought that the writer would have given his readers a definition of "God." I was unable to find one, and in its absence no one could be sure what was meant by it. And what is one to do with a writer who throws such a word at his readers with a—You ought to believe in God, you must believe in God, and there can be no great difficulty in believing in God because you can make "God" mean whatever you like? To make a word stand for anything is to come very near making it stand for nothing at all.

The example just given indicates the religionist at work. It is in strong contrast to the method adopted by scientifically-minded men. When Sir James Frazer had occasion to talk about God he began by saying:—

"By a God I understand a supernatural and superhuman being; who is endowed with intellectual faculties, moral feelings and active powers. In short by a God I mean a beneficent supernatural spirit, the ruler of the world or some part of it, who resembles man in nature though he excels him in knowledge."

That is a straightforward, honest way of presenting the belief in God as it lies embodied in all religions. When Christians pray to God for a good harvest they obviously express the belief that somehow God controls the harvest as every farmer tries to do. When we have a day of national prayer it carries the same lesson. It implies the particular belief that God will in some way give us more arms with which to meet the enemy, more skill in using those weapons, and additional strength in fighting. And we have a day of prayer because God is pleased, or soothed, or persuaded to do something for us that he would not have done without our prayers. Once grant that things

will work out in terms of the natural qualities operating—including the play of human desires and human feelings in general—and we are stating the Atheistic, not the theistic position.

The position stated is, of course, the historic one with regard to the belief in God, and if we assume that our clergy—from the highest to the lowest (this often means little more than from the better paid to the poorest paid)—it expresses that belief now. But what one finds to be the case is that the personal God who listens to our prayers, who has his friends and his enemies, and who loves one and hates the other gets—without explanation—transformed into an impersonal thing that is identified in theory—if not in honest speech—with the god of the Christian, the Mohammedan, or some other religion. That turns all our prayer books into so much printed rubbish, and all except the most ignorant of our preachers into rank hypocrites. Our religious guides behave like a tradesman who should secure orders by showing samples and then supplying in bulk entirely different articles. Since the war began a large number of men have been fined, or sent to prison, for supplying the public with articles that did not correspond with the description given on the packet. It is only custom that prevents our religious leaders being compelled to face a similar indictment.

Even though we had an agreed definition of God from the religious world it is not enough to be told "I believe in God." The question, "Which God?" remains. There was more than a jibe in Montaigne's famous comment that man cannot create a flea and yet he will make gods by the hundred. Those who have read Flaubert's "St. Anthony" can never forget the wonderful picture of the procession of discarded gods that pass before the frenzied vision of the saint each in his own demise giving the promise of a like fate that awaits the Christian deity. It is useless replying to the query, which God am I to look for, by saying "Seek and ye shall find." How can I be sure that I have found something if I do not know what it is I am looking for? It should be borne in mind that recognition is *re*-cognition, and whether I am looking for a god or a manx cat it must be remembered that a previous knowledge is necessary for me to be satisfied that I have found what I desire. When the average preacher tells the average congregation that if those who have doubts of the existence of God will go on their knees nightly and pray for enlightenment they will find God, how is one to be certain that he is not mistaking induced mental and physical disorder for a vision of deity? The late G. K. Chesterton was once very angry with me for asking in what way the ecstatic visions of the saints differed from those of the visions of the dipsomaniac. I have put the same question to others, but no one has yet attempted to answer. To say that the analogy is insulting is absurd. No question is absurd that is relevant, and there is a deadly relevancy in this one. To say that many of the leaders of religion were very able men is beside the point. Able men are not immune from delusions—even Newton could lose himself in that most insane of all insane questions—the biblical prophecies. Many of the female saints of the Church were quite admirable characters, but there still remains the pregnant fact that Jesus figured very largely in the ecstatic visions of the female saints, while Mary was equally prominent in the visions of monks. It is not an irrelevant or an insulting conclusion that if these same monks and nuns had been happily married and had become the heads of families their visions would have been of a different character. My inquiry was as pertinent as the inquiries of a

doctor as to what food a patient has been eating or drinking, or what he has been doing in other directions. As religious people use the word "God" it is not a name, it is a narcotic. Impostures live on ambiguities.

The root of this confusion lies in the fact that belief in God does not rest on any of the alleged evidences given for it. Modern man believes first and tries to find reason for his believing afterwards. Belief in gods—to be exact, the material from which the gods are made—originates with our early ancestors, and primitive man is not a philosopher trying to explain the world around him, but a plain, simple, ignorant individual, not very curious about how things happen, but anxious only to get on good terms with the ghostly beings by which he believes he is surrounded. If he could get rid of his gods he would, but they are as persistent as modern tax-collectors and he has to do the best he can with them. Nothing is farther from the truth than the plea of our present-day clergy that mankind is starving for God. The whole of the agitation for the control of the schools is based upon the open statement that if children are not taught to believe in God before they are old enough to appreciate what is being done they will grow up without religious belief. That is the one solid truth in the present "Collar the kids" campaign. You may create an appetite for gods as you can create an appetite for anything, and an appetite craves satisfaction. But given two or three generations not subjected to the pressure of a special teaching and the adult who believes in gods would be regarded as reversion to a lower cultural type.

I remember a lady coming to me at the close of one of my lectures who was greatly concerned for my spiritual welfare. She said she was quite certain that if I sought God sooner or later I should find him. I replied that if I did spend my time encouraging the feeling that I should find God, and could never be satisfied until I did find him, I might easily persuade myself I had found him. But my difficulty did not lie in that direction. My problem was what use could I put God to when I found him? So far as I can see to-day God is the great sinecure. He no longer controls the weather, he no longer sends disease when he is angry or bestows benefits when he is pleased. Things go on as they will whether we believe in God or not. We trust in God and lose battles, Russia leaves God on one side and wins them. Is there anything we can do with God that we cannot do without him?

My question to the lady who was so anxious I should find God is really the question that fronts all Christians to-day. The Christian says he cannot get on without God. Well, the Freethinker can. What is the distinction between the two? Is the Freethinker made of such superior stuff that he can do all that is necessary without this external help, while the Christian is made of such inferior material that he must have this artificial bolstering to enable him to get through life decently? Mind, I do not say that the Christian is made of inferior material, it is he who so asserts. Frankly, I do not believe him. And I insist that the necessity for any stimulant is shown, not by those who use it, but by those who can do without it. Will some Christian who can speak authoritatively tell us what a Christian can do, plus God, that a Freethinker cannot do minus one?

All we get is a reiteration of the old song that God is essential, although religious circles furnish ample proof that "God" has stood for the frustration of effort and calamity in practice.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## VOLNEY'S "RUINS OF EMPIRES"

IT would be difficult to overestimate the contribution made by France in the eighteenth century to culture and civilization. Side by side with the most appalling poverty and cruelty—through both Church and State—there arose a body of writers, artists and musicians, whose work is almost imperishable.

We did not do so badly ourselves in an England which, if the work of Hogarth is authentic in its representation, must have been a terrible place to live in. Swift, Pope, Fielding, Berkeley, Hume, Gibbon, Paine, among a crowd of others, still make their period an epoch-making one. But there certainly is a glamour about the French giants of those days. What a galaxy of talent and genius!

The name of Voltaire springs to the mind at once, but if that universal man of letters dominates his century, there are others not far behind. Lesage, Saint-Simon, Marivaux, Montesquieu, La Mettrie, Diderot, d'Holbach, Dupuis, Volney, Rousseau, Beaumarchais, are but few of the names which come from literature alone. And the outstanding fact connected with most of them is their Freethought.

The seventeenth century in France was essentially a religious one, at least as far as the great writers are concerned. And it certainly is surprising that such a complete change of view should have taken place in a country bound hand and foot to the religion of the Pope, a country which had in addition a most devout royalty.

Of course, French thought was profoundly influenced by English Deism, but it went considerably further. Voltaire never shed his belief in God, however sadly that was shaken by contemporary events—like the Lisbon earthquake, for instance. But Meslier, Diderot, and d'Holbach became uncompromising Atheists, and this later influenced English thinkers and writers as well as such students of the history of religions as Dupuis and Volney.

It would, of course, be foolish to find in eighteenth-century writers the knowledge of the history of comparative religions, of psychology, of anthropology and folklore, gained by intensive study ever since. Great then as is Dupuis' "Origin of all Worships" it must of necessity be out of date in some things, and the same must be said of the work of Volney—though in fundamentals both writers still wield powerful influence.

Volney, born in 1757, was early attracted by the pursuit of knowledge and his travels on foot through Egypt and Syria laid the foundations of his future success. In 1787 he published an account of these travels which brought him, among other tributes, a medal from the Empress Catherine of Russia. When the Revolution broke out Volney was appointed deputy to the States General, and managed to get passed the resolution: "The French nation renounces from this moment the undertaking of any war tending to increase its territory." And about the same time (1791) he published "The Ruins or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires"—a work which at once established his enduring fame, and which has been translated into many languages. It appeared in English in 1795 and was reprinted over and over again. The Pioneer Press published an edition in 1921 with an excellent Introduction by George Underwood, and this has now been issued again at the modest price of 2s. "The Ruins" is one of the classics of Freethought, and should have its place in every Freethinker's library.

As far as the sun-myth theory of the origin of religions is concerned, Volney was greatly influenced by Dupuis whose work he read in manuscript before it was published. It is not surprising therefore to

find that he agreed with that writer in denying to Jesus any historical existence. Volney says:—

"There are absolutely no other monuments of the existence of Jesus Christ as a human being, than a passage in Josephus, a single phrase in Tacitus, and the Gospels. But the passage in Josephus is unanimously acknowledged to be apocryphal, and to have been interpolated towards the close of the third century; and that of Tacitus is so vague and so evidently taken from the deposition of the Christians before the tribunals, that it may be ranked in the class of evangelical records. 'All the world knows,' says Faustus, one of the most learned men of the third century, 'that the gospels were neither written by Jesus Christ nor his apostles, but by certain unknown persons.' . . . so that the existence of Jesus is no better proved than that of Osiris and Hercules . . ."

Although a lot of water has flowed in the Thames since that passage was written, it rests substantially as true now as then.

Prof. Lanson in his great history of French Literature says of "The Ruins" that it is a "singular mixture of philosophism (a hatred of tyrants and priests, faith in progress and reason) and an exact account of exterior things (customs, manners, local traits, etc.)." But Volney wrote about them all in a splendid style, passionate and straight from his heart. And in particular, he saw the tremendous part in favour of evil that "twenty different systems of religious worship" had played. He contrasts their disciples and the hatred they bear for one another, the schisms and cruelties practised in the name of their various gods—each the "true" one, and each ridiculed by rival believers.

But Volney did not stop on a negative side. It was not sufficient merely to point out errors, stupidities, and cruelties; and so in his "Law of Nature" he takes up the positive side of reconstruction and in a series of questions and answers he indicates what is best for the progress of mankind. He concludes:—

"That all wisdom, all perfection, all law, all virtue, all philosophy, consist in the practice of the following axioms, which are founded upon our natural organisation:—

Preserve thyself.

Instruct thyself.

Moderate thyself.

Live for thy fellow-creatures, in order that they may live for thee."

Volney wrote a number of other works, the most suggestive being his "New Researches on Ancient History," but it is through his "Ruins" he is most famous. He died in Paris in 1820.

H. CUTNER.

## ACID DROPS

THE most important thing in the world is Christianity. So say all Christians. And one of the most important days in the Christian calendar is "Good Friday." It commemorates the alleged crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But why it should be called "good" Friday is not quite clear. One would think it should be "Black Friday." There is a "black" Friday, but that concerns a famous occasion on which a great deal of money was lost, and the loss of money is something that the spiritually minded Christian does not easily forget. So we have a "Good" Friday to commemorate the alleged crucifixion of an alleged innocent man, and "black" Friday in commemoration of Christians losing money.

But "Good Friday" is a day that should be kept very solemnly by Christians. But this year we are at war, so the religious ceremony is set aside for fear it should

interfere with the war effort. A justification of a sort for this is offered by the "Church Times." It thinks the holiday might lend itself largely to an "increase in junketing rather than to an increase in devotion." We agree, but at the same time that a day of jollification is far more beneficial all round than a day of praying. If it could be tested, we are quite sure that "junketeers" would regret the close of the day, while the devotees would be glad it was all over. Of course, the pietists would point out that many got drunk when they forget the "sacred" character of the day. Maybe, but again we have a suspicion that the results of drinking too much beer would, if its consequences could be traced, be not more regrettable than the consequences of an overdose of religious devotion.

For example. The same issue of the "Church Times" informs us the Church possesses "a divinely given truth," without which it believes life is not worth much. But it is just this belief in a divinely given truth that all men must follow if they desire to be saved that has been responsible for far greater evil than all the junketing that followed any form of non-theological drunkenness. Junketing never established an inquisition. It did not ostracise men because they did not believe in an alleged divine truth. We are not advocating the benefits of beer drinking, we are merely pointing out that there are other and worse forms of intoxication that are very much worse than that which is contained in a pint pot.

The "South London Press" is one of the few papers in the London area that shows any degree of liberality where Freethought is concerned. As a consequence of letters that appeared in the paper named, the Rev. C. V. Roberts invited the writers of the letters to meet him at his home for "a frank and open discussion on the Church in its relationship to the problems of the day." When the date fixed by the Vicar arrived the only persons who turned up were the headmaster of a neighbouring school, Alderman McCarthy, and an unnamed young man. From this the Vicar draws the conclusion that "people who criticise the Church are unable to face open debate."

We hope the Vicar will not think us discourteous if we say that the conclusion strikes us as nonsensical. There was no need to go to the vicarage to question the Vicar on such a vague and general subject, and in conditions where the real question would not be properly and fairly discussed. It may be taken for granted that the Freethinkers who took part in the paper discussion have no expectation of converting the clergyman; nor does the Vicar really think he will be able to convert the Freethinker in the course of talk where the Vicar will probably rule the roast. Personally, we should not dream of wasting our time with the most prominent preacher in England on such conditions. The real audience at which both disputants are aiming is the general public. It is the clergyman who seems shy of doing this.

But if the Rev. C. V. Roberts is genuinely anxious to hold a public discussion on any important subject at issue between Christians and Freethinkers we think we should be able to supply him with an opponent. And if the "South London Press" would open its columns to the discussion so much the better. We think this invitation will enable the public to discover who really is afraid of open and fair discussion.

Ruskin said that the advertisement "School for the children of gentlemen" was something that was not to be met with out of England. We hope that is true, and we regret that it should exist or have existed in this country. We know of one orphanage—a very excellent one, by the way—which opens its gates only to the children of gentlefolk who have died poor. The absence of father and mother will not protect the other children from contamination. There are other similar institutions existing. We have also known plenty of cases where parents—who were not even "gentlefolk"—have sent their children to receive the inefficient teaching of a small "private" school to keep their offspring free from contamination by the children who go to a Council school. And how deeply this piece of British snobbery is imbedded in our people is seen in the publicity given to the fact that the Lord Mayor of London actually rides in a common omnibus. Some of the papers printed a picture of him. But did not Mr. Churchill inform the world that he got his democracy from his father. Randolph Churchill as a teacher of democracy is something to remember.

But the true British spirit dies hard, and one is not surprised to learn that the Mayor of Southend refuses to ride about the town save in a car. He says there "is such a thing as dignity of office, and that dignity can only be upheld in a certain manner." Hear, hear! How will anyone be able to tell that the Mayor of Southend is anything out of the common if he is found riding in a tram-car, or walking to his office! And yet one ought to warn the mayor that motor-cars are to-day very common; all sorts of vulgar folk use them. We suggest that a collar with "I am the mayor" in large gilt letters would uphold the dignity of office much better than a car.

When a mania for reform sweeps this country there is no telling where it will stop. The B.B.C. has decided that for the future songs and jokes mentioning drink are to be taboo. "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" is forbidden. There are to be no swear-words, even "hell" and "damn" will no longer be heard. There is to be an exception in the case of such plays as Shaw's "Pygmalion," which made "bloody" quite fashionable. G.B.S. might advertise himself as "Licensed swearer to the B.B.C." Probably the B.B.C. will decide on a greater measure of religion to make up for the absence of swearing. If so it will be damned rough on the public.

Cardinal Hinsley, in a recent number of the "Jewish Bulletin," asks for fair play for the Jews. He does so on the grounds that "We Catholics, with other Christians, have had our share of persecution . . . and we can well understand the Jewish reaction to similar treatment." That sounds well, but we are afraid it tends to misunderstanding. It was while the Catholic Church was at its greatest power that Jew-baiting and Jewish persecution was developed as part of a holy crusade. It was the Catholic Church that drove the Jews out of Spain, created the ghetto, and kept alive the form of religious feeling upon which Jewish persecution depended. The Nazi persecution of the Jews may have been more obscene than the persecutions the Jews suffered under Roman Catholic rule, but that will not remove from the Catholic Church this and other forms of persecution that it nursed and perpetuated for so many centuries.

The impudence of the pious would astonish us if it were not common. For instance, A. Winslow (presumably a clergyman) writes from The Vicarage, Winchester, that the "Hi Gang" performance is put "on the air every Sunday at church time." Mr. Winslow thinks it is "an insult to British intelligence" to "permit such a waste of money." We are willing to wager that there is a far larger number of men and women who listen to "Hi Gang" than ever listen to the church services; and, as these people pay for the performance, they have surely as great a right as anyone else to be heard.

Mr. Winslow, it must be noticed, does not object to these entertainments on weekdays. He is shocked because they occur on Sunday and at church time. But there is a more or less religious service on another wavelength, and those who wish to listen to parsonic moanings and groaning and stale platitudes may do so. Perhaps it is professional jealousy that is at work, and Mr. Winslow envies "Hi Gang" its audience. But we are sure that quite as many feel better for listening to a humorous show as listening to a clergyman playing his part, which is intended to be serious but which causes many a smile.

Some of the geniuses we have in the Civil Service have found another form of economy. Strict orders have been issued in the Service that great economy must be exercised in the use of lead pencils. Notices have been issued giving examples of how to sharpen a pencil, what amount of lead must be exposed, and at which point the stub may be thrown aside. It is also now an offence to waste paper. We expect that a great quantity of paper has been used to secure this pencil-cum-paper economy in the Services. We suggest that the issue of fewer forms, and less verbiage on them, might be advisable. Our Civil Service riots in issuing forms, and the many thousands of officials we have must spend a great deal of their time in designing new forms. Meanwhile there are complaints in all directions that when paper has been laid aside as waste, in a great many instances it remains uncollected. Perhaps we have done wrong in calling attention to this, since it may only excite to the use of more forms, and perhaps the appointment of a few more officials.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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### TO CORRESPONDENTS

- G. TAYLOR.—Book, leaflets and paper sent as requested; thanks for your keen support.
- J. HUMPHREY, J. D. HOCKIN.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.
- A. J. ASHBY.—Thanks for article. Shall appear as soon as possible. We appreciate the contents of your letter.
- J. C. KIRKMAN.—Pleased to hear from you. Will appear next week. Will write you.
- J. D.—As soon as possible. Very much crowded with copy.
- G. J. HANDSTOWN.—Thanks for compliments. We fancy that if a vote were taken, the Army chaplains would have an easy majority in favour of their retirement.

*Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.*

*When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.*

*THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.*

*Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.*

### SUGAR PLUMS

TO-DAY (March 29) Mr. Cohen will be in Glasgow. The meeting place will be the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street. The usual hall is taken for war purposes, and is not available for meetings. But the Cosmo is, we understand, a very comfortable hall. The meeting will be held in the afternoon, chair taken at 3 o'clock, doors open at 2.30. Subject, "What Will Follow Religion?" We hope to hear of a crowded house. The more Christians present the better. A number of donation tickets have been printed, and these may be obtained from Collette's Bookshop, 1a, Dundee Street, from 65, George Street, and at the door of the Cosmo Cinema.

It may be worth noting that this country is depending for winning the war on assistance given by India, China, Russia and the United States. America has no God in its constitution, although the name is used with great frequency. India is very mixed, with only a very small number of Christians. China, with its 400,000,000, pays little attention to God. Russia has performed wonders in planning and fighting, and in conquering, and sets God on one side altogether, and the vast majority of the younger generation bother very little about him—or it. The outlook for the Christian deity does not look very promising. Its greatest figure just now, General Chiang, is a Buddhist, and so conforms to the Atheism of Buddha.

Meanwhile, we have unimpeachable evidence that with a number of men in the Armed Forces of this country, and particularly in the Air Force, religion is taken very, very lightly, and a much larger number than during the last war have written themselves down as Atheists, Agnostics, Rationalists, or of no religion. The outlook for religion is black; the outlook for Freethought is very bright.

But there is one point that we wish all Atheists to note. There is comparatively little trouble in answering "What Religion" with "None." But there is often an attempt, particularly in the Navy, to cajole men who wish to enter themselves as "Atheist" to be content with "None" on their papers. We cannot say more upon that matter; to do so would be to betray confidences. All we have to add is to advise all entering the Forces to insist on a truthful and honest reply to "What Religion?" If they insist they will get their way.

One of our readers' inquiries for the titles of books that are of a non-religious character, but which would be attractive and instructive to young people, say from nine

or ten to 13 years of age. The answer is not so easy as it appears. Anyway, we invite from our readers suggestions, if possible based on their own experience.

It is good that a serious attempt is to be made to settle affairs in India. But the move would have come with greater grace if it had been done earlier in a generous spirit, and if the old school tie brigade and the army of "get money, honestly if you can, but get it," could have divested themselves of the belief that India's main purpose on the earth was to provide openings for our trade, posts for a certain number of men who believe they have a legitimate claim for good posts and comfortable pensions. We sincerely hope there is now an attempt to come to some reasonable arrangement that promises contentment. And it should be done without further cant from our side.

We have pointed out more than once the many difficulties of settling affairs so as to please everybody. India has a very mixed population, but it is absurd to believe that the backward portion of its inhabitants can seriously interfere with the resolve of the better part of India if Indian leaders and our Government can be brought together with a determination that a satisfactory arrangement shall be made. The religious problem—so far as Hindooism and Mohammedanism are concerned—is not impossible of solution if Parliament will be both just and liberal. Mohammedanism has greater traditions of culture and freedom than has Christianity, and India has also a philosophy and a culture that may develop along its own lines without being a slavish and hypocritical copy of our own.

Above all the ignorant superstition of the essential that the man with a white skin is necessarily a higher product of evolution should be killed. It is a doctrine that has ignorance and class prejudice written all over it. It is the worst expression of Nazism applied to colour instead of to "race." Although offhand we would say that those who have this ridiculous prejudice against colour are mainly believers in "race." Ignorance and prejudice are very penetrative things, and it is not easy to keep them in separate departments.

Freethinkers will not have forgotten that India has never had a more loyal and unselfish friend than Charles Bradlaugh. We have many reminders from our Indian readers that his name is not forgotten among the very large body of Indian Freethinkers and of other reformers. An account of what he did for India would make interesting reading for the new generation of Freethinkers.

"By the King's wish" March 29 is to be a day of national prayer. We are inclined to doubt the King's wish, and we are not inclined without the strongest proof to lay the blame on any single person's shoulders. This will make six days of prayer we have had, and the only possible evidence of any favourable reply is Russia. Of course, it is always possible to say things would have been worse without prayer. But it is difficult to see how bringing more intelligence to bear on the war, and leaving out such exhibitions of imbecility as Days of National Prayer would have made things worse than they are. Luckily neither King nor Bishop has any power to order people to go to Church, and it is certain that the vast majority of people will stay away—as usual.

The following is sent us by a friend. The story is taken from "Tumbling the Hay," by Oliver St. John Gogarty, published by Constable:—

"Sir William, and not Sir Thomas, was in the ward when Sinbad's aneurysm burst. His assistant, seeing the dripping bed, exclaimed 'God help us!' Sir William said: 'Before calling in your unqualified assistant, will you kindly proceed professionally and attend to the hæmostasis.'"

We have previously drawn attention to the "thrillers" of Mr. John Rowland and are pleased to devote a few lines to his latest, "The Death of Nevill Norway" (Herbert Jenkins; 7s. 6d.). Mr. Rowland is well known as a journalist in the Freethought and Rationalist Movement, and his more definitely "popular" work is in some senses a reflection of this. His new book is a more serious work than usual, being based on a murder which took place about a hundred years ago in the West of England. It is a satisfactory attempt to reconstruct an historical atmosphere and at the same time a piece of entertaining prose.

## SCIENCE ON LAND AND SEA

THE 18th century witnessed the first ocean voyages undertaken for scientific research. Vessels were then equipped with instruments essential to the naturalists who accompanied these expeditions. An early and epoch-making voyage of discovery sailed the Pacific from 1768 to 1776 under the command of the celebrated Captain Cook. The then young Joseph Banks, a distinguished pioneer, accompanied the captain and generously supplied the necessary equipment. A disciple of the famous Linnaeus served as botanist and various plants and animals were collected hitherto unknown. Two subsequent voyages of the same illustrious navigator proved equally rich in result.

The voyage of the "Beagle" (1831-4) is memorable both for its immediate achievements and for its subsequent influence on human thought. Captain Fitzroy commanded the vessel and Charles Darwin served under him as naturalist. As Dr. Charles Singer appositely states in his interesting and highly informative "Short History of Science" (Oxford, 1941; 8s. 6d.), Darwin's name "is so associated with the evolutionary idea through which he profoundly influenced scientific, philosophical, political, religious and ethical thought, that certain of his other claims are often forgotten. To appreciate his distinction, it is necessary to recall that had he never written on evolution, he would still stand in the front rank among naturalists. . . . Thus, as a single example, even during the voyage of the 'Beagle,' he reached conclusions that modified and extended the fundamental working principles of geology and palæontology."

The exploration conducted by Sir James Ross which surveyed the Antarctic was a coincident landmark in scientific inquiry. In the expedition of the "Erebus" and "Terror," the evolutionary botanist, Joseph Dalton Hooker, officiated as naturalist and his descriptions of the flora he collected are still of value. Tasmania and New Zealand, in addition to Antarctica, were laid under contribution and well and truly formed the foundation of plant geography. Moreover, Dr. Hooker drew the attention of the scientific world to the far-extending importance of the minute marine organisms—the diatoms—in Nature's economy.

This voyage was also outstanding for the remarkable discoveries made in relation to life in the ocean depths; 400 fathoms were sounded and forms of life were everywhere in evidence, but it is now known that living organisms most closely congregate both at the bottom and at the surface of the sea. Also, Dr. Singer assures us that, "Until 1869, however, with the laying of the first Atlantic cable, it was not realised how vast and varied a fauna and flora there is, and how different are the conditions of life at the two levels. The effective knowledge of the ocean fauna dates from the work of the "Challenger" naturalists. They show that most of the living matter in the world is contained in the microscopic plant forms that float at and near the surface."

The exploration conducted under the auspices of the Admiralty—the "Challenger" expedition during 1872-6—was the most ambitious so far undertaken. Furnished with complete equipment, six scientists accompanied the undertaking. In the course of the voyage of 69,000 nautical miles, the "Challenger" steamed over all the oceans and visited nearly all the least known regions of our globe, while innumerable deep-sea soundings were carried out.

So extensive and multifarious were the collections of this expedition that, after elaborate scientific study, the British Government was constrained to publish the findings of an imposing array of naturalists in 50 substantial volumes. These, it is claimed, preserve "the best worked-out account of any biological expedition, and form the solid basis of a science of oceanography." It was now apparent that any reliable interpretation of life in general depended upon a far more detailed acquaintance with the oceans than that previously recognised. As Dr. Singer aptly says: "A study which involves more than two-thirds of the earth's surface, and implicates the whole past and future history of the other third, is of primary importance to our conception of life as a whole."

The American steamer "Tuscarora" then embarked on a biological quest, and its able staff of scientists examined the bed of the Pacific. This adventure was rapidly succeeded

by other United States expeditions, while Norway made its contributions to oceanography. Alexander Agassiz accompanied the American enterprise, which proved richly fruitful in its discoveries. These and subsequent inquiries have revealed important information concerning our planet's configuration both past and present.

The fauna and flora special to the surface of the sea were closely investigated by the "Challenger" naturalists. The study of these floating forms of life—the plankton—prepared the way for an important branch of biology, and oceanic bionomics now ranks as a leading department in natural history.

Very remarkable are the distinctions between the surface plankton and the organisms that dwell in the depths of the ocean. It is now known that "pressure at 5,000 fathoms is about five tons to the square inch, as against 15lb. at the surface. No sunlight penetrates there; below 200 fathoms all is dark. The temperature in the depths is uniform and not much above freezing. There are no currents and no seasons. Conditions are substantially uniform the world over, on the Equator and at the Poles. There is no vegetable life to build up the bodies of the animals that dwell there, and thus the animals there prey on one another, drawing their ultimate supplies from the dead organic matter that rains down from above."

That terrestrial floral and faunal forms vary in different climes has long been observed, but the marked peculiarities of organic distribution now known are of comparatively recent discovery. Buffon, in the 18th, and, among others, Darwin, Lyell and Wallace, in the 19th century, have all inquired and meditated over these puzzling phenomena. Apparent anomalies in marine life have their analogues in terrestrial distribution.

In his important pioneer work, "The Geographical Distribution of Animals" (1876), which still ranks as a standard authority, Dr. A. R. Wallace noted many remarkable contrasts. The most striking of these is that relating to the famous Wallace Line. Although so close together, the Eastern islands of Bali and Lombok—now the scene of Japanese aggression—possess an animal population markedly distinct in character. These two islands are separated by a strait which at one point is merely 15 miles wide. Yet, despite their near neighbourhood, Bali and Lombok differ, Wallace states, "far more in their birds and quadrupeds than do England and Japan." In truth, this very deep if narrow strait separates the fauna of the Oriental region from the distinctly peculiar animal species of the Australian area.

Curious anomalies in the vegetable domain have given rise to speculative interpretations. The illustrious Humboldt and other high priests of science have noted and ruminated over the striking resemblances exhibited by the flora of South America, Africa and Australia. Dr. Hooker sought an explanation of these likenesses by postulating an ancient land-bridge between Australia and South America which persisted into the Jurassic Period, and this may prove a correct solution of the problem.

Again, with Williamson of Manchester's researches, the extinct floral forms that have contributed to the formation of our coal deposits, such as the fossil remains of fern-like plants, club mosses and horse-tails, permit a fairly accurate restoration of the picture presented by the earth's scenery in far distant ages. As Dr. Singer observes: "Knowledge of the geological succession of plant forms became astonishingly detailed, and the floristic landscape at various periods and in various parts of the world are confidently restored. Moreover, owing to the fact that plant cells have definite and thick walls which may be preserved in fossils, it is sometimes possible to examine the minute structure of fossil forms. In many cases even the reproductive processes are susceptible to close examination."

In a saner world than the one we now experience, scientific researches ever more beneficial to humanity might have proceeded, but alas! practically all inquiry of a cultural character has perforce been suspended by the present exhibition of human depravity and strife.

T. F. PALMER.

Although a soldier by education and profession, I have never felt any sort of fondness for war, and I have never advocated it, except as a means of peace.—GENERAL GRANT.

## CELESTIAL JOURNEY

ONE Sunday old Donald leaned on the parapet of the humpbacked bridge that spanned the railway to the village, his eyes watching the dark clouds scudding before the wind while the pale February sun shed his watery rays on farms and pasture that stretched away to the distant hills.

"Looking for the mansions in the sky?" asked a quiet voice behind him. The old man turned towards his questioner. "Aye," he replied, "I pray that when I die I may rise up there into Heaven, but from what I hear in the village there's little chance of Neal, our Atheist news-agent, ever taking that journey!"

The young man smiled. "Mingling with the earth will be far enough for me when I die," he said, "but listen, Donald. Six days in the week from six in the morning till evening I work in my little shop selling newspapers, but on Sundays I go out into the open countryside amongst the hedges and the trees and watch the birds and beasts and the sky—especially the sky. Now to you Heaven must seem a near-at-hand, friendly sort of place; just up to that cloud, maybe, round the corner—and you're there! Am I right?"

"Aye, but——"

"Look, Donald!"

The sombre pall hanging low overhead seemed suddenly to roll like a curtain down the sky, and beyond surged gigantic billowy clouds towering mass on mass, greyish-yellow and edged with gold, while still further off in the calm upper air fleecy white clouds floated motionless against a background of infinite blue.

"Now, Donald, the heavenly road lies open before you!" cried Neal, "let's see how you'll go. Swing up and over that grey film of cloud that's clearing away to the west; a long flight, but the golden light behind the grey cheers you on. At length you reach the base of the stupendous range of shining cloud and rise steadily to the chilly, wind-swept crest, where maybe you rest a while, surveying the panorama that still lies ahead and above you. Aye, it looks a longish way from here across the boundless blue to that strip of vapour up there. Perhaps you cast a downward glance towards the old brown earth, now misty in the distance below. Ah well! I suppose I better push on, you say, and off you soar, alighting at last on a feathery wisp of white cloud, thin, ethereal, a puff of mist and frost; and God!—how cold! You shiver and stare upwards. You screw up your eyes, then open them wide until they fill with desolate, remote, freezing, frightening empty blue. But now, Donald, you must depart from your last ghostly foothold and speed on, for you have hundreds of thousands of miles of nothingness yet to climb—so despairingly you throw yourself——"

"Stop, for Christ's sake!" cried the old man hoarsely, his upturned eyes reflecting all the bleakness and austerity of that unutterable loneliness.

"Coming back to earth, Donald?"

Neal's voice recalled him from those icy pinnacles of thought, restoring his vision from high heaven to the hills of home. Donald's eyes now moved lovingly from peak to peak, from white farmhouse to the swaying bare-branched trees and meadows exuding the first fragrant odours of spring. Under his gnarled hands the old man felt the stone parapet of the bridge faintly warm, comforting. Beside him a sparrow hopped, chirped, and fluffed his feathers in the sun. Homewards the two men slowly moved from the bridge.

"Anyhow," muttered old Donald with a backward glance at the sky, "I hope I live a long time yet!"

IAN YULE.

The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge. Knowledge and love are both indefinitely extensible; therefore, however good a life may be, a better life can be imagined. Neither love without knowledge nor knowledge without love can produce a good life.—  
BERTRAND RUSSELL.

## LIVES

VERY few people are interested in a previous life, but quite a large number feel more or less certain about one hereafter. We can at any rate be certain of this, that no living person has any experience of a life before, or of one after this, so we all start at scratch—including the clergy.

The interest in a future life and lack of interest in a previous existence is the difference in their value as marketable commodities.

A market can, and has been, created for peeps into a future life, but a previous life is a bit more tricky to handle. The highest authority on personal experience is the person concerned, and having no experience of having lived before, a tipster's prediction that an individual might have been a great poet, victorious general or a gangster in a previous life is dead wood compared with the promised fun in the next world, especially if we get drafted to the Summerland.

The nonsense of a future life is religious, but only from a modern aspect. I feel religion should now be defined as two categories—primitive and civilized. Belief in the supernatural remains a definition of primitive religion, but the religion of civilized people should be defined as perpetuation of primitive beliefs in the supernatural.

With primitive people there is no self-apparent nonsense in their belief in a future life. It is something real, it grips and weighs heavily upon the social habits of the individual and of the tribe, and under no circumstances would any flippancy towards those in the next world be tolerated. Such is the lot of man where the gods and religion are natural and healthy. Civilization has altered that, although the self-appointed warriors of Jehovah continue their rearguard action, with the sabotaging of progress and a come-back for the gods as the objective.

Anthropology portrays man as a living organism reacting to his environment, as against the manufactured article of Genesis. Within that environment the family is evolved, and under the stimulus of the family all that is best in human nature flows easily into the sweetest memories; for where family affection and loyalty exist, there one of the most beautiful phases of human life has been reached.

But Nature shows no more respect for man than for a microbe; the laws of Nature apply to all living creatures, including man, who receives no preferential treatment but just stays for a period, or, as Omar Khayyām has it:—

Lo some we loved, the loveliest and the best  
That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,  
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before  
And one by one crept silently to Rest.

And we, that now make merry in the Room  
They left, and Summer dresses in new Bloom,  
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth  
Descend, ourselves to make a Couch—for whom?

Associations make life more desirable, and unless our own associates are all in the future life at the same time—that is, all arriving there at the same time—that which makes life more desirable is missing. As leaf after leaf falls from the family tree something from Self disappears. The death of a dearly loved member of the family lessens the charm of life with those who remain, but the death of chance associates in shipwreck or other disaster usually inspires thanks to God for lucky escapes, thus showing the difference in depth of family feeling.

Civilized man does not crave for a future life for the mere sake of living. Let the clergy reach the top notch in descriptive art in their story of a future life, but what poor stuff compared with home and family here. Small wonder that coroners declare those who volunteer the exchange as insane. In a warning illness, with normal people, a medical man in his consulting room is preferred to a peep at Jesus in heaven. The music of family talk and laughter here is sweeter by far than a hallelujah chorus hereafter. The throne of God with its emerald, jasper, sardine stone and rainbow effects, is a November fog in comparison with the sunshine in a happy home on earth; in fact, no form of future life in another world with supernatural administration, will ever be considered a better proposition by civilized people than wife, husband, family and home in a happy nest on earth.

R. H. ROSETTI.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## FREETHOUGHT AND THE FUTURE

SIR,—I have two points to make which it seems convenient to make here and now:—

(1) An unfortunate misprint in my article, "A Cup of Tea," published in "The Freethinker" of March 15, gives a quite wrong impression. I am made to say, speaking of erstwhile believers, "They love their religion, but they want something to replace it." This should, of course, have read: "They lose their religion, . . ."

(2) I am content that readers shall judge between Mr. Yates, my newest critic, and myself. Only on one question I would take him up. He says destructive criticism is a necessary prelude to construction. Agreed; but the Freethought Movement has now been engaged on destruction for a goodly stretch of time. Does he not think that it is time something a little more constructive manifested itself?—Yours, etc.,

S. H.

SIR,—One gets somewhat tired of reading in "The Freethinker" of all places that Freethought has not a constructive policy. Freethought has always a constructive policy: just Education. By "education" one would mean a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, apart from hope of material gain. How many people could give a logical connection between astronomy and the existence of the human brain; and there is a logical link which takes in various other sciences. The logic may be faulty, but is at least arguable; and this is not astrology.

I am told that if young children learn to think in two languages—that is, when they are ordinarily learning the language of their parents—that in later life they can take up any language and learn to think in it, as the faculty is not frozen. Apparently, whatever a child learns in the first three years of its life actually fixes its future thinking.

And what must be to a young child—the fear of eternal rewards and punishments—perhaps the most fearful and impressive part of our early education is not allowed to be questioned at all. So, at the most plastic stage of the infant organisms existence, its most active faculty—that of curiosity, questioning, thirst for knowledge, or what one may call it—is crystallised and frozen at the same time as it learns one language only; and, with the present system of so-called education, by the time the child might have had an interest in things in general it is too late to learn the method of thinking, which is the faculty one would associate with a brain.

One has only to note the insistent demand that more children go to Sunday Schools to stop crime waves.

Most children in our district go to these schools, and their parents went also; but still the children do not seem to reason that it is wrong to injure anyone else in any way only just because it is wrong.

Engineers are usually well educated in their own line, and one does not expect to see self-respecting engineers smashing, say Rolls-Royce cars with sledgehammers, or watchmakers breaking up watches.

But constantly humans are smashing up much more complex and interesting engines—that is, human bodies. A properly educated being would never think of destroying such a complex mechanism as the human body. He might try to educate it differently, and if dangerous might restrain it, but each phase of its life would or should be of such interest to an educated public that it would be considered a crime to cut the history short by even one day.

Freethought, by stressing the question of knowledge and education, is offering the only constructive policy.—Yours, etc.,

W. R. ENGLISH.

## THE MOTHER OF GOD

SIR,—I have read this pamphlet with interest and edification; it should be in every Christian home. What Catholic theologians may think of it one may surmise, and some of Barham's witty verses from the "Ingoldsby Legends" seem apposite:—

Never, I trow, have the servi servorum  
Had before 'em such a breach of decorum,  
Such a gross violation of morum bonorum.

The "Mother of God" merits admission to the "Index."—Yours, etc.,

EDGAR SYERS.

## "SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM"

SIR,—In Views and Opinions, March 15, 1942, you quote extracts from Sir Stafford Cripps' speech to the Anglo-Soviet Youth Rally on March 1, as reported by the "News Chronicle."

At the same meeting, in answer to a question Sir Stafford made some comments on religion in Russia. The gist of his remarks was that the "burning zeal" of Russian youth came from ideals based on the "spiritual materialism" which might be called their religion. The difference between their "religion" and religion in the orthodox sense of the word was that theirs is a seven-day-a-week religion instead of a one-day.

Paramount News recorded the question and answer, and I understand from a friend that the Streatham Astoria has this particular news on this week containing his actual reply. Presumably the same news should be showing at all local cinemas using Paramount News, should you wish to have a record of his precise words.—Yours, etc.,

DAVID DUTTON.

["Spiritual Materialism" is a very good term, and is philosophically useful as indicating something higher than ethics.—EDITOR.]

## GOD AND THE ATHEIST

SIR,—I, too, have sometimes felt that the position of the sincere Atheist is not made sounder by the attitude of bitterness against a non-existing God.

As an effective way of putting the position, it might possibly be more directly to the point if this aspect of Godhead were transferred to those who are prepared to stomach it and at the same time continue to worship it!

It is not altogether easy to define and express the meaning of the "Christian" who has been reading "some of our articles," and the above is only an attempt to do so. (See Acid Drops, "The Freethinker," March 8.)—Yours, etc.,

"REGULAR READER."

## THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP

(To Eire)

Shall, then, the fire smoulder down the years?  
Shall, then, the narrow breeding hate be passed  
To future generations to outlast  
The voice of reason? Shall the sad arrears  
Never be paid—continued in old fears?  
We know your ways to which you will hold fast:  
Respect the mould in which your house is cast:  
We only hope a day of friendship nears.  
Saorstát Eireann, brooding, mystic race;  
Mother of soft-voiced singers, dreaming sons:  
We simply ask that you should pay the price  
To live in freedom, not by English grace  
But by your own: to distant sound of guns  
Close ancient wounds in mutual sacrifice.

T. HADEN.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

## LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12-0, Mr. L. EBURY.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., B.Sc., "English Social Differences."

## COUNTRY

Indoor

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (P.P.U. Rooms, 112, Morley Street): 7-0, a Lecture.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Jubilee Hall, Market Hall, Blackburn): April 2nd, 7-15, Mr. J. V. SHORTT, "The Great Alternative to Religion." Literature on sale.

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow): 3-0, Mr. Chapman COHEN, "What Will Follow Religion?"

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): 3-0. A Lecture.

Nelson Branch N.S.S. (21, Rhoda Street, Nelson): 11-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON. A Lecture.