

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Ourselves and Others

"THE FREETHINKER" has always been greatly indebted to its readers for the manner in which many of them have converted themselves into advertising agents. Without adequate financial resources to advertise on an effective scale, with enemies on every side, uncompromising with either friend or foe, "The Freethinker" has kept steadily before it the purpose for which it exists. It is now the oldest existing Freethought journal in Europe, and with the exception of the New York "Truthseeker"—which is still gallantly battling away—it is the oldest in the world. We are proud of that record, and proud also of our record in the history of the paper.

But all the brilliancy in the world would not have kept "The Freethinker" alive had it not been for the loyalty and industry of very many of its readers. Most people see only the public war against superstition—that mother of injustice and friend of stagnation—but we are always alive to the fact that very active and very successful battles take place out of the main fighting area. "The Freethinker" is given to a friend, discussions follow the contact; and when a Christian can be brought into close controversial contact with one who understands Freethought he is as good as damned—as a Christian. If he does not join the fighting ranks of Freethought his faith in religion is to a great extent weakened. The clergy know this; which is one reason—the great reason—why the thirst for public discussions with representative Freethinkers is now very rare. The clergy prefer long-range fighting of the kind provided by that home of bunkum and dishonesty, the B.B.C.

A Christian in a Fog

Some time ago I received from an evidently new reader of this paper a letter from which I take the following:—

"I am not questioning the sincerity of the writers, but I do not see any cause for rejoicing that you cannot be certain on the great questions of God and the hereafter. To a considerable extent that must cultivate a feeling of uncertainty from which Christians are free. You do not know whether there is a God or not; you do not know whether there is a future life or not. But one cannot build life on uncertainties. . . . We Christians have a certainty that you Freethinkers lack. We live and work on in the confidence that in God's good time truth will

gain victory over falsehood, right over wrong and kindness over brutality. If we are wrong we can lose nothing in following such an ideal."

Now, I have little or nothing to say against the form of this criticism. It is almost free of that air of condescension with which so many foolish Christian preachers approach Freethought, and that tremendous conceit that "I know God and God knows me and we are on excellent terms together" attitude which characterises the vast majority of convinced Christians. I wish to explain a position rather than to justify a state of mind; not so much pleading for a conviction as drawing up an affidavit.

I do not approach a Christian feeling or believing that I must be happier than he or that he must be miserable, as he might justifiably be, with such a creed as he professes. I have known many Christians who seem to be comparatively comfortable while professing beliefs that should make them very miserable; and I have known Freethinkers who were full of gloom in circumstances that seemed to me sunlit. Happiness seems to be quite a matter of what was once called "temperament," or of the action of those glands about which modern science has so much to say.

I also wish to say that I doubt whether a belief in Christianity ever did give the feeling of security and of comfort that it is assumed to give. So soon as Christians appear in history they are found bemoaning their lot, of the dangers of damnation they ran, of their own unworthiness, etc., etc. "We are all miserable sinners and deserve damnation" is not a phrase used by Freethinkers of Christians. It is a description that Christians gave to themselves—perhaps the truest self-description Christians ever set down. And it cannot be—at least, it ought not to be—very comforting to believe, as we are told day after day by contemporary preachers of high repute, that without God we are nothing and can do nothing of value. That should of all things produce a feeling of littleness, of mental and moral poverty, of frustration calculated to induce depression. Actually, it is the Christian creed which emphasises the miserable "job of work" God turned out when he made man and the deplorable consequences that ensued.

A Case of Delusion

It strikes me that my Christian correspondent is really looking on an Atheist as one who is in grave doubt as to whether God exists or not, uncertain whether he is not losing something precious that the Christian who meets the unbeliever with "I wish I could believe as you believe," but "I must obey my conscience" sort of an attitude. I can assure the Christian that an Atheist does not envy the Christian; his feeling is rather that of profound sympathy for the way in which he blunders through life. I never envied a man the use of an ear-trumpet or a wooden leg, and I can find no greater justification for envying a man who is under the delusion that he cannot feel happy unless he is supplied with both wooden legs and ear-trumpets—although it is perhaps an occasional gain not to be able to hear much that is said; and there may be a feeling of ease when one is able to take

off the wooden leg and recline comfortably on a couch or bed. Much of this talk about the value of religious belief is just cant. There are fashions in phrases as there are in clothes, and the catchwords of the churches are not more worthy of intellectual respect than those of the music hall—probably the latter are the better of the two.

Of course, my correspondent cannot see any cause for rejoicing in knowing that the belief in gods is just nonsense. He is not likely to feel that way while he believes that human society will fall to pieces without belief in God. Many a man has the same belief with regard to getting drunk, or gambling, or other forms of dissipation. It is only when he has risen above these extremes that he discovers how foolish he has been. Said a Scotsman after being lectured by a Sheriff for drunkenness, "Have ye ever been drunk yersel?" "I have not," replied the indignant Sheriff. "Aweel," replied the lectured one, "then ye dinna ken what ye've missed." The Christian is really not in the position to lecture an Atheist. The Christian has never been where the Atheist is, but multitudes of Atheists, thanks to a social misfortune, have occupied and outgrown the position of the theist. Our Christian critics quite misread the existing situation. They appear to think that it is we who are on the defensive. That is not the case. It is the godite who must defend himself against Atheism, and the only way he can do this is to demonstrate the existence of gods. In his mode of defence the Christian is at least two centuries out of date. In matters of fact he is milleniums behind.

For it is obvious nonsense to say that we do not know whether there is a God or not, or whether there is a future life or not. If we use either term with a decent regard to the meanings of words we can dismiss both on the same grounds that we can set aside stories of hobgoblins, witches flying through the air on broomsticks, the transformation of water into wine, the changing of a biscuit and a glass of cheap wine into human blood at the wish of a priest, and the like.

To put the matter in a nutshell, credibility always follows possibility and probability, and both possibility and probability follow knowledge and understanding. To a child almost anything is possible. Santa Claus may come down a chimney, pigs may fly, birds may really be brought to life inside a conjuror's hat. To an adult such things are absurd because experience and knowledge have combined to make them incredible. The possible is limited by our knowledge and our understanding.

What We Know

What the present-day Christian has to realise, and what their religious guides keep away from them so far as they can, is that the genealogy of the gods have been worked out carefully; first by the historian, and where he stops short the anthropologist takes up the story and shows us the gods as a precipitation from the ignorance and fear of our primitive ancestors. And so we follow the trail from the beginning to the end, finding the gods ever decreasing in number and power, and to-day, even with some of their defenders, reduced to the vagueness out of which they sprang. There used to be a saying in Lancashire intended to cover the man who made money, the son who spent it, and the grandson who was back in the mills. That outline was summed up in "from clogs to clogs in three generations." We might well say something similar of the gods. From mist to mist in three stages. First the indefinable mysterious power the savage sees at work all around him; next the man-like god, ruling tribes and nations of men as a human but

of greater power than man; and then the final stage of to-day when God has become indescribable, unperceptible, unrecognisable, a mere mathematical symbol. From mist, through mystery, to a mist that barely hides the final stage of complete dissipation of all the gods.

And now I hope that my Christian reader will not object to my pointing out that what he says about a feeling of certainty where we have uncertainty, and that the belief that God helps the Christian to face life with more confidence, etc., etc., is just so much cant. Unconscious cant, I agree; but cant all the same.

A dictionary definition of "cant" is "to reproduce the stereotyped formulæ of a religious or political faction." That seems to me to really fit the situation. For whatever opinions we have about life, life is still the same to all. It offers the same problems to all, and ultimately is content with only one general solution. And these essential facts of life and the problems that life present to us are essentially the same. Life has varied patterns, but they are woven out of the same essential stuff. And there is a compulsive force about nature that my correspondent completely ignores. No matter how absurd, or even how injurious, religious doctrines and practices are, there is a limit to their operation. They must not, at the very lowest term, so act as to threaten the existence of the people who practice. Human sacrifice, to take one example, cannot develop beyond a certain point or the whole species would die out. The religious practice of celibacy carries with it the same check. It is not difficult to find many other examples of life placing limits to religious developments.

But apart from this crude action of nature, human society, in its development, serves as a restraining influence. Religious practices and doctrines have to count with the growing humanising of life and the development of scientific knowledge. It is, for example, only a century and a-half ago when freedom of opinion in matters of religion was denied. The brutal and brutalising Christian teaching of eternal damnation was in full swing, and even protestant nonconformists were denied civic equality. The blasphemy laws were in active operation, and the literal truth of the Bible was a cardinal feature of established Christianity.

The list might be extended indefinitely. The plain fact is that the abandonment of the cruder form of Christian doctrines, the checking of Christian intolerance, the humanising of the Christian creed is not due to new revelation, nor to fresh discoveries about God. It is entirely a matter of what we may term the power of cultural forces. Against that all religion fights in vain. The Churches may defeat a man, they may suppress a movement, but against the progress of human knowledge and the development of human intelligence no Church and no institution is eternally victorious.

I think if my correspondent will "think on these things" he will find himself less certain of the benefits of Christianity and may even develop a better conception and appreciation of the play of Freethought in the world.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"Learn while you're young," he often said,
 "There is much to enjoy, down here below;
 Life for the living, and rest for the dead!"
 Said the jolly old pedagogue, long ago.

—G. ARNOLD.

THE GREAT ISLAND OF THE EASTERN SEAS

THE giant island of New Guinea, situated directly north of the Australian Continent, is nearly 1,500 miles in length and about 400 miles in breadth. It is apparently the largest island in the world and its possession is of paramount importance to Britain and its Allies in any scheme of defence against Japanese aggression against Australia.

The Portuguese sailed there in 1562, and other Iberian mariners visited the island a little later. Originally named Papua, one of the Spanish navigators renamed the island New Guinea, as the natives so closely resembled the African negroes. Dutch expeditions followed, but even the cruise of the "Rattlesnake" failed to establish a complete acquaintance with the general configuration of New Guinea. Indeed, "it was not until 1873," states Professor Keane, "that Captain Moresby, in the 'Basilisk,' determined the form of the south-eastern extremity, which had been previously totally unknown, and thus completed our knowledge of the external form and dimensions of this vast island."

Also, it was not until 1858 that the first European, Dr. A. R. Wallace, ventured to visit the interior with no protection save that of a few Malay servants. Twenty years later Wallace's enterprise was emulated by Russian, Dutch, German and other English observers.

The island contains many mountains, some ascending above the snow-line, while in a country so extensive and diversified, the climate is far from uniform. Some districts experience a prodigious rainfall, while others are relatively dry. The mean temperature at Port Moresby is about 83 deg. F., and high figures have been registered in other parts of the island, but although it is hotter in many Australian stations, the climate proves excessively trying to Europeans owing to the heavily moisture-laden atmosphere. "The chief disorders affecting foreigners," it is stated, "are [or were] the various forms of malarial fever and ulcers of the leg. Elephantiasis and leprosy are common among the natives, and still commoner is a form of ring-worm, which, though found in many islands from the Moluccas far into the Pacific, has its chief focus in New Guinea. Spreading from various centres, it covers the skin with circles of curious accuracy of outline. In time, these meet, and the whole body may become covered with the marks, ring forming within ring, the patterns thus giving the form of tattooing."

Apart from cultivated areas, the island is clothed in dense virgin forest, and 4,000 species of vascular vegetation flourish. The flora is markedly Malayan, with an admixture of Australian forms, but many species and varieties, both floral and faunal, appear peculiar. Of 80 species of plants collected in Macgregor's expedition to the heights of the Stanley Owen eminences, nearly half have been pronounced endemic.

The animals, however, have been more extensively studied than the plants, and it is thought that New Guinea is the centre from which the majority of the animals of the adjoining islands, and many found in Northern Australia, have been derived. Placental mammals are scarce, but there is a native pig, elsewhere absent, and mice of a peculiar character. All other mammals are marsupial, which include the strange little tree kangaroos which resemble the larger terrestrial species far more closely than the kangaroos native to Australia. Four other marsupials resident in the island are absent in Australia.

But the birds make a magnificent display. Their gorgeously coloured and patterned plumage, in addition to other attractions, give them pre-eminence throughout the feathered world. Some 40 varieties of birds of paradise adorn the island and the multitudinous array of kingfishers, parrots and pigeons include the most remarkable and ornate representatives of their respective groups.

Relatives of the wonderful bower-birds of Australia inhabit New Guinea, and their constructions are so remarkable that they almost baffle belief. Their existence, however, is testified by many reliable naturalists. One of these birds "builds a raised ring round a small tree, this miniature circus being about two feet in height. . . . But singular as is this bower, it is eclipsed by that of another species (*A. subalaris*). This

bird also selects a small tree as the centre of its building and forms around its base a bank of moss, which it decorates by inserting flowers." Ground pigeons equal in size to small turkeys and the cassowary, being free from the persecution of predaceous quadrupeds, flourish in their island home.

Unlike the secretive Malay, the Papuans are jovial, bold in demeanour and demonstrative. As a rule, their habitations are erected on piles and are communal in character. These dwellings range from 500 to 700 feet in length and house numerous families. In some districts the natives build shelters in tall trees, to which they retire in times of danger only, but in regions where tribal dissensions are chronic the natives seem to live permanently in these high-tree retreats.

The Papuan natives are not noted for their sea voyages, but are mainly devoted to agriculture. The natives cultivate yams, sweet potatoes, sugar-cane and bananas, and fence their fields against the devastations of the wild boars. In what was German New Guinea, kava is imbibed, but as a rule the natives enjoy no exhilarating beverage and are driven to quench their thirst with Adam's ale from the running brooks.

The English mission stations have effected very little in their attempts to convert the natives. The Dutch and German missionaries have proved an even more dismal failure. Along the coasts a few Papuans pass as nominal Moslems, but the mass of the people continue completely pagan. In 1908, Dr. Guillemard stated that "In Dutch territory Dutch and German missionaries have been at work in Dorei since 1856. . . . Twenty-eight years from this date the entire result of the work and the sacrifice of many lives was only 16 adult and 26 child converts."

According to the same authority, the native cult "consists mainly in a sort of spirit-worship—a belief in the spirits of the woods and rocks and the sea, almost all of which are of a malevolent disposition. The spirits of the dead wander restless until some abiding-place is prepared for them; hence, on the death of any person, the relatives proceed to make a wooden image as an earthly habitation for his ghost." Ancestor worship is met with in Dorei Bay and elsewhere. Some tribes locate the future world below the earth, while others place it beyond the clouds.

Primitive Communism seemingly survives in New Guinea. Little if any evidence of chieftainship is available, although exceptional men naturally exercise greater sway than others. A markedly independent course of conduct is noticeable, despite the customary tabus, although life in general is considerably shaped by popular sentiment and tradition.

T. F. PALMER.

THE DEVIL AGAINST GOD

Both God and myself, as you doubtless all know,
Were chronic old bachelors, long time ago;
Indeed if I do not most sadly forget,
We are both of us chronic old bachelors yet.
I know that I am, and I cannot recall
Such fact as God's having been married at all.

And yet, I suppose, 'tis unknown to no one,
That Jesus was this same old bachelor's son;
That Mary, betrothed though she was to another,
Became of this bachelor's child the fond mother.
And now if God was, indeed, Jesus's pa,
And never was married to Jesus's ma.

I'm sure I cannot for the life of me see
How such a relation could possibly be
And not be adult'rous, as much as 'tis when
Wives are now made mothers by bachelor men;
Hence God is convicted, you plainly do see,
Of adult'ry, WHICH IS NOT E'EN CHARGED AGAINST ME.

—JOHN R. KELSO, "The Devil's Defence."

When men shall tell you, pointing to those who possess
on earth great power, Behold your masters! believe them
not. If they are just, they are your servants; if they are
unjust, they are your tyrants.—LAMENNAIS.

ACID DROPS

THE Bishop of Bradford informs us that God is at work, but it is not easy to see his hand or to discover why he is working as he is. Hear, hear! But if you can't see anything he does, and do not understand why he does the thing that we can't see and don't know, what in the name of sacred imbecility are we to conclude?

The President of the National Union of Teachers, speaking at the annual conference, said that some members of the House of Lords are unfitted to judge the State schools. It depends upon the point of view. From that of an ardent and efficient educationalist this may be true. But it is because the people referred to *do* understand the character and power of the national schools—great though the room is for improvement—that the plot between the Board of Education and the Churches has come into being. They know that equal opportunities for all pupils to go as far as their abilities will carry them would be a heavy blow at the mock-democracy that at present exists. If the genuinely "common people" among our "upper" classes were dependent upon their native people, and the really better people among the "lower" classes each found their level, what a change in the country there would be. The President of the N.U.T. is wrong. The members of the House of Lords to whom he refers *do* understand the nature of the State schools. All their opposition comes from that.

The "Church Times" praises a recent work on "Comparative Religion" because "it corrects the dangerous bias" of the "Golden Bough." "Bias" is very christian-like. "The Golden Bough" shows more than a "bias" in concluding that all belief in gods has no other root than the ignorance of primitive humanity. Sir James Frazer stated a firm conviction, and supported his statements in a way that, so far as substantials are concerned, left no room for doubt. "Bias" implies some kind of uncertainty, but there is no uncertainty with capable anthropologists as to the origin of the belief of gods.

The value of the standpoint taken up by the "Church Times" where Christianity is concerned may be gauged by its reference to the Resurrection of Jesus as having "historical veracity." Does anyone really believe that after a man is well and truly dead that he can get up again and walk about the streets? If any man told a preacher that he saw a dead man rise from the village graveyard and walk round the village, would the preacher believe it? But if a thing that is supposed to have happened 2,000 years ago is credible, why would a similar thing not be credible to-day? What answers?

The Bishop of Norwich, in a letter to the "Sunday Times," argues for children being taught religion—the Christian religion, of course—in the home. "Children," he says, "seen endowed with the capacity for understanding the things of God." We agree. Childhood is the time for an understanding of gods and fairies, and demons, and goblins, etc., etc. Fairy tales, to which all are gods and goblins, good spirits and bad spirits, belong to childhood—to the childhood of the race and the childhood of the individual. The pity of it is when we find adults preserving this capacity for believing the impossible and glorifying the obscure; and does not the New Testament say that there is no salvation unless you become as little children?

Six hundred men and women have been recruited to supplement religious work in the Forces. We should like to know who is paying for all this? The Government, through the Board of Education, is already paying the expenses of teachers to learn more about disguising the truth concerning Christianity, and the War Office is paying a preacher to answer, through the B.B.C. (carefully selected) questions on religion. These things, with others that have cropped up, should act as a reminder of the fact that—setting the war on one side—the Tory influence is predominant in the Government, and the Tory Party and the Church have always run well together. 'Ware Hitler—and the Churches!

Someone advertises in the "Birmingham Mail" "Thanks to St. Jude, patron of hopeless cases, for favours received." It really does look as though the author of the paragraph is a hopeless case, and so fitted for St. Jude. But how does the recipient of St. Jude's favour know that the "Birmingham Mail" knows that the Saint reads its columns? If we only knew the address we would send St. Jude a copy of "The Freethinker."

In one of the (*Limited*) Brains Trust sessions, the question was raised whether church parades should be compulsory? Joad appears to have been the only one who spoke against it. The Dean of St. Paul's stuck up for his own trade, and the egregious Campbell came out with a good-sized "whopper" that in the Navy all the sailors he had ever met loved the church parade. He must have kept himself to himself while he was at sea. If he goes back to sea he should take care to mix with sailors. Mr. Evelyn Waugh also deserves mention for saying that church parades are as necessary as hygiene. It was time someone suggested disinfection with regard to the Brains Trust—more than ever limited.

We all know that religious lie, so quickly manufactured and so industriously circulated when the war started, that this was a war for the preservation of Christianity. We have been waiting for the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to offer some kind of apology for this falsehood, but up to the present the historic Christian plan of working a falsehood so long as it could be worked and, when its character is quite patent, to remain silent. Very seldom do Christian leaders apologise for having circulated the lie, and their congregations appear to think none the less of them for their Münchhausen activities.

So we are pleased to see the following, as an editorial note, in the "Church Times" for April 10:—

"Some of the least Christian elements in the country are the loudest in their proclamation of the alleged fact that the Allies are conducting a religious crusade against the forces of anti-Christ. The 'Church Times' has always been very careful to avoid making any such claim, which it believes to have no justification in fact. Our view of the campaign now being waged by the United Nations is more modest. We believe it to be an attempt in which Christians and pagans should, and do, unite to establish between nations, and so far as possible within nations, secular recognition of the cardinal virtues of justice and truth, which form the basis alike of Christian and of civilised pagan morality. The battle is not for Christianity, but for a world in which Christianity is possible. Under the Nazi swastika and, indeed, under Axis principles generally, neither Christianity nor civilisation is safe."

That is a plain, straightforward repudiation of the ridiculous cry that the war is for the defence of Christianity. Perhaps other Christian papers will follow the example set.

It is a great pity that men such as Sir Stafford Cripps cannot, where religion is concerned, use language with a moderate regard to exactitude. We are quite sure that if he, as a lawyer and in court, used important terms with the looseness that he uses a religious phrase, he would be at once pulled up by the presiding Judge. For example. In his parting address in India he said: "We fight against the godless barbarism and bestiality of our enemy." But this is just nonsense and is an insult to the millions of "godless" men and women who are on the same side as Sir Stafford. Where are our godless enemies? They are not the Japanese. They are not godless. It is certainly not any of the nations that have been conquered by Hitler. It is not the German people who are godless, for the majority of them are not godless but strongly godful; and on any psychological understanding of religion the leaders of Germany are also religious. We suggest to Sir Stafford that even at the risk of losing some Christian supporters he should, in future, refrain from using language that is inaccurate and insulting, worthy only of an ordinary Bishop or a politician hunting for votes.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- G. E. MACDONALD.—Received, and will appear.
- B. COOKE.—We could not print your reply without publishing the article, and for that we lack space.
- E. SMEDLY.—Your Catholic friend is, as is common with that class, correct in form while false in fact.
- J. CAMPBELL.—The General Secretary will write you.
- For distributing "The Freethinker": C. H. Hollingham, £1; J. Mackie, 4s.
- C. M. TURNER.—The B.B.C. exists by Charter, and is a monopoly. Actually there is a very large measure of Government control, but the arrangement is such that no one can say where governmental influence begins or ends. Its present policy is a distinct threat to freedom of expression. An unwarrantable amount of the time is given to religious propaganda of a substantially dishonest character.
- A. D. BLORE.—Your letter was quite to the point, but one must not expect fair play in the British Press where religion is concerned. Here and there the Freethinker gets a chance of expressing himself, but whether the letter is printed or not it often does good. If all Freethinkers were persistent perhaps some papers would awaken to the recognition of how many of their readers are not so religious as editors assume they are.
- A. E. THOMAS.—The wealth of the Church is derived from past Government grants, land, investments, rents, etc. The Church of England wealth is uncertain, but it cannot be less than 250 millions. The Church is also free from payment of rates and taxes, and that equals a yearly gift of very large proportions.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Farnival 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, Farnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

THE Annual Conference will be held this year, as last year, in London, and for the same reason—the war. It is not wise to count on many delegates travelling from afar in existing circumstances, and the Conference will confine itself to the necessary business matters and a general discussion on the present and future of Freethought. If the Conference is as successful as it was last year, there will be no great cause for regret—save that of meeting old friends and new members. That feeling will be shared by those absent and present.

We again draw special attention to the first meeting of the new Radio Freedom League, to-day, April 26. Particulars will be found on the back page of this issue. The platform is a good one, and all those who care for freedom of speech should, if possible, be present. The place of meeting is Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, off Holborn. Mr. Chapman Cohen will take the chair at 6-30 p.m. We hope this is the beginning of an agitation that will make broadcasting what it should be—an instrument of free speech and of enlightenment.

In his handy little book, "U.S.A.," by D. W. Brogan, and published by the Oxford Press last year, the author says of the United States:—

"Public questions are discussed on the air far more frequently and far more realistically than they are in

Britain. . . . Not only (do) presidential candidates go on the air to expound their case. Minor and indeed hopeless causes are preached freely, and the radio industry has become the vehicle of a freer, more varied expression of public opinion than the Press can ever be."

As we are now so full of praise for the United States, British citizens—at least, those who care for real freedom—might ask why we must put up with such a radically dishonest and one-sided monopoly as the B.B.C.

The "Teignmouth Post" for April 10 contains an interesting summary of a discussion that took place between A. J. Z. Vanstone on the Freethought side and Mr. E. D. Wiggins as opponent. Mr. Vanstone appears to have had a fairly easy task, and that the audience agreed with him in opinion was shown by the proposition "That the benefits mankind enjoys to-day are due to Science," being supported by what the paper describes as "a large majority" of the audience. Mr. Vanstone seems to have been worthy of a better antagonist. Still, the discussion must have done good.

We regret that when offering the list of books for children the other week, several names were misspelled. "Early" should read "Everyday," etc., by Marjorie Quennell, "Depp" should read "Jeff," "Dorothy" "Davidson," and "Stuart" "Stewart." Sorry!

We were glad to see a little of the fighting spirit displayed at the Conference of the National Union of Teachers the other day, and also at the Malvern Conference of the Association of Head Mistresses. At both gatherings the existence of the "Public Schools" was condemned. At the first meeting it was said:—

"The son of the dustman should sit side by side with the son of the duke—so much the better for both."

At the other meeting Miss Davies said:—

"We want a democracy, and we cannot say that we have such a society in England. The first essential for that is that all children should spend their lives together—rich and poor."

Quite healthy sentiments, although we are fairly certain that if Mr. Churchill advocated the policy named, his Premiership would not last for long. But there is no need to demand the abolition of the "public" schools, which are at present very "private" ones.

What is needed is the retention of all that is good in any type of school, and that admission to advanced education should be open to all on precisely the same conditions, and that the wealth or position of the parents should have nothing to do with it. Those children with small natural equipments would soon find their place, so would those of greater capacity. It is little short of criminality that a boy or girl with poor parents should be deprived of the best the country can give, and denied the opportunity of giving the country the best they have, because their parents are poor and do not belong to the "higher" circles or the more wealthy circles—and that often is all that is meant by "higher."

The clergy have to-day two lines of advocacy, one intended to catch the less thoughtful of the general public, the other intended to cajole those who, while rejecting formal Christianity, are yet drawn to some form of religion. The first of these emphasises the power of prayer, the second plays the "Back to the Bible" tune. Both are well met in two pamphlets just published by the Secular Society Limited, which would do much excellent work if they are sufficiently circulated. One is, "What is the Use of Prayer?" by the Editor of "The Freethinker." It is concise, clear and written in the author's best style. The value of prayer shrinks visibly with every paragraph. The second pamphlet is by one of the most powerful and one of the wittiest advocates of Freethought, Colonel Ingersoll. The title is, "The Bible, What is it Worth?" Just now a wide circulation of both these pamphlets would bring good results. The price each is 2d., by post 1d. extra.

BIBLE NOTES AND NOTIONS

THE great problem which faces all students of the Bible at the outset is: What are its origins? How did we get our Bible? How did the books which form Holy Writ come into being? How, and in what language, was it first transmitted to us?

It may be said at once that these questions have not yet been answered. In spite of the most minute examination of the problem by able scholars, little but conjecture has been the result of their labours. Of course, conjecture and speculation may yet prove to be on the right track; and so many books have been published full of suggestive ideas in the hope, no doubt, that some will eventually provide the correct answers to the problem. But so far no real proof has appeared.

The tradition as to the transmission of the books, in the canonical Hebrew Bible, is that they were all more or less destroyed by the Babylonians when the Jewish race was taken into captivity about 588 B.C. The fall of Babylon itself, about 536 B.C., made it possible for the captives or their descendants to return to Jerusalem, when the building of the second temple was commenced and an attempt made to re-establish the Jewish religion. This was the principal work, later, of Ezra the Scribe. It was he, with other "learned" men, who are claimed to have re-written the Old Testament as it stands, in the precise words of the original authors, through divine inspiration, and to have settled once for all its canonical limits (about 456 B.C.). One account of how this happened will be found in the Apocryphal 2 Esdras xiv. 1-48. What is thought of this tradition, believed in by almost all early Church historians and writers, can be seen from the following by the Rev. Professor Ryle in the orthodox "Cambridge Companion to the Bible":—

"The history of the process by which the books of the Old Testament were collected and recognised as of sacred authority is hidden in great obscurity. The early Jewish tradition adopted by Fathers of the Christian Church, which assigned the task of its completion to the miraculous agency of Ezra . . . is . . . devoid of historical authority. . . . Neither the original legend nor its later development rests on evidence of any authoritative value."

From this, then, it is obvious that, even if there were ever such a person as Moses, there is no evidence whatever that he wrote a line of Genesis or the Pentateuch. The real history of the composition of these books, and the others in the Old Testament, is completely lost. This is admitted by almost all writers on the question of the Hebrew canon who have attempted to solve the problem in our day. They would be the first to repudiate with contempt any claim which makes every letter and dot in the Bible as "sacred" or "inspired."

The Hebrew canon is, in fact, a growth of many centuries. Some very early writings were in all probability preserved—like the "Song of Deborah and Barak" in Judges v.—though how, or in what language or writing, is quite unknown. This was perhaps composed in about the 11th century B.C., and other war songs were added in the course of years, like that of "Lamech" in Genesis iv. and the "Red Sea Triumph Song" of Exodus xv. Somewhere about the 8th century came the various legends of the Judges, and, with increasing astrological knowledge, the blessings given by Jacob on his deathbed to his sons and the adventures of Samson the Sun God. By the time the two monarchies, Judah and Israel, were settled (or unsettled) historical data about their kings were collected and preserved. And

it is probable also that "prophets" or poets made their appearance then with the usual lugubrious fulminations against the people for "sinning," which have distinguished similar utterances ever since.

Contact with neighbouring peoples and their legends, together with the assimilation of more native folklore and myths, soon began to account for the stories of the Creation and the Deluge. By about the year 621 B.C. the book of Deuteronomy perhaps began to take shape in order to wean the people away from what may have been the more attractive worship of Baal, or Baal-Peor, and other "abominations." As the power of the priesthood increased all sorts of laws began to be formulated against witchcraft, idolatry, sexual transgressions, murder and many other things.

In 586 or 588 B.C. Jerusalem was attacked and captured, and, of course, doleful prophets like Jeremiah were obliged to raise their voices to prove that this terrible calamity was due entirely to the fact that the people had not "hearkened" to the word of the Lord. At all events, the captivity which followed in all probability provided a tremendous impetus in collecting and arranging the national writings—adding to them, or adapting many legends current in the other lands. Some of these were undoubtedly brought back by the exiles on their return to Jerusalem, and a good deal of what Higher Criticism calls the Priestly Code probably made its first clear appearance in the 5th century B.C.

It is not known how "Elohim" and "Jehovah" became together identified with the one God of Israel and Judah, but there are very clear traces in the Pentateuch of separate narratives embodying Jehovistic and Elohist elements being combined with the Priestly Code. This interpretation is the only one which accounts for the different narratives of the same event and the many confused recitals of others.

It is not known in what language this literary accumulation was written or how it was preserved. Dr. Naville, in the "Sveich Lectures, 1915," contends that the early Old Testament books were all written in Babylonian cuneiform. He opposes the positions taken up by the Higher Critics and insists that Moses is the veritable author of the Pentateuch, though he denies that it was written in Hebrew. It was, however, turned into "old" Hebrew, which language had, we are told, the same alphabet as the Phœnician. Here again we can only go by conjecture. None of the Old Testament in the "old" Hebrew has come down to us—unless we take the Samaritan Pentateuch, preserved by the hated Samaritans, to be this old Hebrew. To put the matter briefly, all one can say is that it is highly probable that the literary collection which comprised some of the books of the Old Testament was in the time of Ezra written in Aramaic, or even in Arabic, though it cannot be as yet proven.

But there certainly was great literary activity during the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C., when perhaps collections of "Proverbs" were compiled, historical books like Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah appeared, and erotic songs, like Solomon's and fictions like Esther were circulated. Later came Daniel and some of the books in the Apocrypha, written in the Greek language, which obviously shows that it was understood by the Jews, and which paved the way to the translation known as the Septuagint.

This necessarily brief sketch of the rise of the Old Testament is based on the conclusions of the Higher Critics, though it must be stated that they differ much among themselves. In works like the "Encyclopedia Biblica," their results are collated and criticised to such an extent that often it is difficult to ascertain what exactly is the final conclusion. The

present writer can only say that all this is proof of the utter uncertainty which prevails on the question of the origins of the books comprising the Old Testament. One thing alone is quite certain. Few, if any, of the great Higher Critics believe in its divine origin; they are as far away from the fervent faith of the early Christians and Jews on the question as they are from those who believe that Osiris is God Almighty. The words "inspiration" and "revelation" are meaningless terms to most of them.

H. CUTNER.

A PRO-ROMAN HISTORICAL SURVEY

(Concluded from page 164)

THIS massive seven-volume work, "European Civilization," does not overtly set out to be "Roman Catholic," but there can be no doubt that it is so in general effect. No one needs to deny that its director, the late Edward Eyre, genuinely desired the telling of true history; but, as a Catholic, he believed the doctrines of that Church are infallibly true. If that is so, it follows that no supposed facts are really facts if they contradict the dogmas of the Roman Church. Therefore, "true history" must agree with those dogmas. An editor holding that view could hardly produce a work whose general tendency was not to support Catholicism. In the Preface to Vol. 1 (both as originally published and as—we shall recur to this in a few minutes—"reissued") Mr. Eyre wrote: "The [History] Chairs at Oxford and Cambridge date only from the 18th century. It has, consequently, happened that the work of historians has been done in an age of exuberant nationalism, and in every country local patriotism has dominated the approaches to history." This has led (he added) to various faults, such as the acceptance of the "inevitability" of our European "divergences." For these alleged faults Mr. Eyre's writers would substitute a more vivid realisation of the essential "unity" of Europe "as something unique and as the chief watershed of human activity."

A remarkable fact now calls for mention as to a voluminous article by a writer not named in the list already given. When Vol. 1 was first published in 1934, it contained an enormous treatise—indeed, really a book in itself; pp. 501-965—entitled "The World of the Old Testament and its Historicity," by Michael J. Grunthaner, Doctor of Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Biblical Commission and Professor of Old Testament Literature at St. Louis University. This article was on very old-fashioned lines: the first chapters of Genesis were accepted as true historical accounts of the origin of the world and mankind. On p. 513 it was stated: "God formed the rib into a woman by the addition of other matter to that of the rib, which he used as a foundation." Moses was accepted as the author of the Pentateuch, though "it seems [sic] obvious that Moses did not compose the account of his death and burial" (p. 669), and a number of secretarial and other modifications of absolutely direct Mosaic authorship are tentatively allowed (pp. 669-70). What needs to be noticed, however, is the COMPLETE DISAPPEARANCE, from this "European Civilization" series, of this article soon after publication. The volume containing it is found in the British Museum Reading Room, London (press-mark. 09075 bb 13); but if anyone looks for Professor Grunthaner's massive article in the volume as now on sale, he will look in vain. No explanation is made; the pages have been renumbered and the enormous treatise is simply gone. Why?

The first article of Vol. 1 is Professor Schmidt's on "Primitive Man." It criticises what it regards as "the injury done to the study of primitive man by evolutionary preconceptions." Dr. Schmidt does not deny the evolution theory as a whole, but he says: "The theory of development has, no doubt, done valuable service in the reconstruction of the history of primitive man; but we can no longer close our eyes to the serious injury done to the study of primitive man by excessive devotion to theories of an undeviating progressive development along one simple definite line." We ask in amazement, however: Does

Professor Schmidt suppose that to be a correct description of any reputable scientist's theory of evolution? The process of evolution is admittedly chequered, with steps back as well as forward. Can Dr. Schmidt have read the symposium, "Darwin and Modern Science," published by the Cambridge University Press so long ago as in 1910? Really, however, Dr. Schmidt's meaning is fairly obvious. He does not wish to denounce the evolutionary theory altogether, but he desires to minimise it as much as possible. This bias causes him to caricature it: and this is a regrettable defect in an article in several ways interesting.

It is not possible here to do more than note briefly some outstanding features of the seven books. For example:—

In his article on "The Religious Crisis of the 12th and 13th Centuries" (vol. 3), Professor Guiraud, writing of "the Albigensian heresy," takes the ordinary Roman Catholic view that it was a form of anarchy, destructive of society. It must be borne in mind, however, that the accounts we have of it are derived from its enemies. In any case, was a bloodthirsty war of extermination the right way to remedy the ills? Again, Dr. Guiraud writes thus of the medieval Crusades: "[Pope] Gregory X., therefore, had solidly prepared the great Crusade which was to launch all the Christian kings, and even the Tartar infidels, to the assistance of Palestine." Were those tragic mass-wars, however, not worse than any of the "heresies"? Bigotry and fanaticism worked up into a science: what miseries this produced! Dr. Guisaud seems not to appreciate this, and that lack of perception spoils his outlook on medieval life—as it also largely subtracts from the otherwise very meritorious article (vol. 2) of W. E. Brown on "Christianity to the Edict of Milan." He describes in detail the ever-growing power of clericalism. We fail to find, however, that he is aware of the largely harmful results of that process.

The article, "The Reformation on the Continent," by Professor Cristiani (vol. 4), is interesting, and is by no means a mere piece of Roman Catholic apologetic. It recognises the faulty human elements in the Church. That very fact, however, brings us to a dilemma: Either the Roman Church should show some clear signs of divine guidance, or it must be classed as a human development like others. Dr. Cristiani's article, by its very candour, leaves on the mind the second of those alternative impressions. A similar remark applies to Professor F. M. Powicke's interesting article (same volume, and since published also as a separate book) on "The Reformation in England." On the other hand, that (in the same volume) by Myles V. Ronan, on "The 'Reformation' in Ireland," is decidedly too one-sided. The very title (with the controversial inverted commas to the word "Reformation") betrays excess of bias, as does the title of its first chapter: "The First Attempt to Destroy the Catholic Religion." The contention of the Reformers, in the 16th century, was that they were not "destroying the Catholic Religion," but freeing it from Papal overgrowths. Whether that contention was correct or not, the real nature of their claim should be recognised.

Perhaps one of the most interesting articles—because directly impinging on modern problems—is that of Christopher Hollis (vol. 4) on "Religious Persecution." It gives a tolerably fair survey of the lone history of the subject, but fair though it is, it fails to see the real point, which is this: Absolute certitude (if it exists) is an *individual, personal* thing. Persecution of opinions, however (if based not on mere social needs, but on the assumed certainty of the persecutors' tenets), assumes it to be a *diffused, public* thing. As it can never be that, persecution of opinions (as opinions) is unreasonable.

Mr. Eyre's monumental series is useful as a corrective of opposite biases, but the impartial reader will not accept it as really an objective, non-partisan work.

J. W. POYNTER.

Without LIBERTY, what union would there exist among men? They would be united as the horse is united to his rider—as the whip of the master is to the skin of the slave.—LAMENNAIS.

THE CHURCH IN NAZI EUROPE

FROM time to time there appears in the Press a note about a protest against some Nazi outrage which has been made by a dignitary of some Continental Church. It may be a sermon preached by a Bishop in Norway; it may be a pastoral letter issued in Holland. But these are isolated events, and it is difficult to know just what is going on in these countries, and how the various religious communities are faring under the heel of the Nazi. (Incidentally, what about the Freethought organisations? Why do we never hear anything of them? Have they all been suppressed? It would be interesting to know.) Now, however, there has been published a small booklet by Dr. William Paton, a well-known religious writer, which I think could be read with profit by Christian and Freethinker alike. Entitled "Continental Christianity in War-Time" (Livingstone Press; 3d.), it gives a general summary of the position in most of the countries of Europe and the way in which the Churches—especially the Protestant Churches—are reacting to the invaders. It is, of course, a biased statement, for it is based on the facts given by Churchmen in the occupied countries. It is, however, none the less valuable because of that, for it gives a graphic account of struggles and arguments, of failures and successes. It is, in fact, a kind of interim report of the value of Christianity in a time of moral and ethical crisis.

The curious fact that derives from it, however, is this: it would appear that religious belief has some value for the ordinary man, in that it gives him what he thinks is firm ground on which to stand. The very pastors whom he has neglected in peace-time turn out to be valuable leaders in time of war. The political parties lead far less effectively (or so it would appear) than the Churches. To analyse the reason why this is so would, I feel, be a valuable lesson for the average Freethinker. It is quite possible that the Churches now are faced with the greatest menace to their very existence which they have ever had to deal with—certainly the greatest menace since the far-off days of ancient Rome; and for that reason I think it behoves us all to study such Church publications as that with which I have here been concerned. If the Churches provide the lead in time of war—the sort of lead which they would appear to be providing in Holland and Belgium, in Norway and Denmark—what will happen when peace returns? Will the people who had left the Churches in the period between the two wars leave them again when this war is over? Or will they feel that religion has provided a refuge in difficult days and is thus deserving of greater support?

It is an interesting question, and a question of more than merely theoretical interest. For on the answer to that question depends the whole future of religion, the whole future of Freethought, perhaps the whole future of civilisation.

S. H.

CORRESPONDENCE

STR.—I am glad to see that a Radio Freedom League has been formed, and that it is going to hold a meeting under the chairmanship of Mr. Cohen. I am satisfied, however, that it will never accomplish much unless it attacks the legal monopoly given by Parliament to the B.B.C. If the chairman had been Charles Bradlaugh, that is where the movement would have begun, for one of his favourite subjects was the utter impossibility of maintaining free speech under a Government monopoly of the Press.

In the United States there is severe competition between broadcasting systems, with the result that they are all desperately anxious to give out anything that will interest the public. In January there was a great Birth Control Convention in New York, attended by 1,000 delegates and addressed by many eminent scientists. Two broadcasting systems sent out reports of its proceedings, which were heard by millions of people. Julian Huxley, who was in Cleveland, addressed it over the wireless.

There is a popular idea that this country is too small to have competing systems, but experts say that that is moonshine. There is competition elsewhere in far smaller areas.—Yours, etc.,

R. B. KERR.

RADIO FREEDOM LEAGUE

PROTEST MEETING

Against the policy of the B.B.C. in relation to controversial subjects

**Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
HOLBORN, E.C.**

SUNDAY, APRIL 26th

at 6.30 p.m.

Doors open 6.0 p.m.

Speakers :

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W. B. CURRY, M.A., B.Sc.
P. P. ECKERSLEY, M.I.E.E., F.I.R.E.
Dr. F. H. HAYWARD, M.A., B.Sc.
ELIZABETH MILLARD, M.A.
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SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields: 3-30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit.—Philosophy and Science—II.

COUNTRY

Outdoor

Blackburn N.S.S. Branch (Market Place), Sunday: 7-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

Blyth (The Fountain), Monday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), Saturday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Hapton, Thursday, 7-15: Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

Huncoat, Saturday, 7-0: Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames N.S.S. Branch (Market Place or Castle Street), Sunday: 7-0, Mr. J. W. BARKER.

Newcastle (Bigg Market), Sunday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.