

THE FREETHINKER

EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN

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CONTENTS

Views and Opinions—The Editor...	261
The Witch—Bayard Simmons	263
Acid Drops	263
To Correspondents	265
Sugar Plums	265
John Donne—N. T. Gridgeman	266
Freethought Padres—J. R. Sturge-Whiting	267
A Predecessor of the Brains Trust, and a Digression— Edgar Syers	267
Obituary	268
Sunday Lecture Notices, Etc.	268

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Editor Steps Aside

ON two or three occasions I have, so far as "Views and Opinions" are concerned, given myself a holiday. On one of these occasions I was domiciled in a hospital and was busy getting well. It was the only time in sixty years that I had blundered in this way, and I was probably let off under a kind of First Offenders Act and a promise to behave better in the future. Hitherto, I have not broken my parole, although doctors shake their heads solemnly—perhaps disapprovingly for behaving in a manner which, if it was universally adopted, would empty a great many houses in Harley Street and its environs.

On the other occasions I handed the front page over to some celebrity—a dead one, who couldn't complain at what I was doing. Lucian was one of the characters; Lucretius, I think, was another. Far from offending my readers, I received a compliment that might have been paid me on the lines of the man who arrived very late for a dinner party and offered the usual apologies to the lady of the house. "Oh, Mr. Smith," replied the hostess, "please don't apologise; you could never be too late."

Many of my readers paid me the same compliment. Some said they were the best articles I had written for some time. Others begged eagerly for more. But whatever the exact form of the comment, it amounted to "Never hesitate to give us somebody else's 'Views and Opinions' in place of your own." For some time after reading these compliments I was able to put on my hat without the use of a shoehorn.

And now, with the exception of selecting parts from what the author has to say, I am vacating my seat in favour of Mr. H. Fielding-Hall. Mr. Fielding-Hall spent a number of years in Burma. He held official positions there, was intimate with the natives, and showed a rare understanding of a people whose mode of life was so foreign to that to which he had been accustomed. The war of annexation began in 1885 and ended in 1889. It was preceded by a newspaper agitation in this country which—well, we had better not say too much about it

for the moment. It reflected anything but credit upon this country and we have been paying the price. The Burmese were mainly Buddhists, and Buddhism—pure Buddhism—is not properly a religion at all. It is a philosophy which, whether one accepts or not, is, as a rule of life, as much superior to Christianity as a pure polished diamond is to the reflective quality of a half-polished piece of rusty tin. I am taking Mr. Fielding-Hall's account of the Burmese Buddhist's view of war as contrasted with the very accommodating Christian one. I will only add one explanatory item. King Thibaw had for some time been pictured in the English Press as a dissolute tyrant soaked in alcohol. Mr. Fielding-Hall says emphatically that Thibaw was a strict Buddhist. He never persecuted and "abstinence was enforced in the palace more strictly than elsewhere." Now to hand over these columns to the author. He speaks from his book, "The Soul of a People"—among the loveliest books I have read:—

"I went through the war of annexation, from 1885 to 1889, and from it I will draw my examples.

"When we declared war in Upper Burma, and the column advanced up the river in November, 1885, there was hardly any opposition. The river that might have been blocked was open, the earthworks had no cannon, the men had no guns. . . . So Mandalay fell without a shot, and King Thibaw, the young, incapable, kind-hearted king, was taken into captivity. . . . The people were stupefied. . . . They (the Burmese) expected the English would soon retire and then their own Government would reorganise itself. Meanwhile, they kept quiet. . . . They looked to their local leaders for help, and, as too often, these local governors were not very capable men. They sought, as all people have done, the assistance of such men of war as they could find—brigands and free-lancers and the like—and put themselves under their service. The whole country rose. All Upper Burma was in a passion of insurrection, a very fury of rebellion against the usurping foreigners. Our authority was confined to the range of our guns. . . . There was no safety for an Englishman or a native of India save within the lines of our troops. . . . To overthrow King Thibaw was easy; to subdue the people a very different thing.

". . . (in Burma) there was, and is, absolutely no aristocracy of any kind at all. The Burmese are a community of equals in a sense that has probably never been known elsewhere. All their institutions are the very opposite of Feudalism. Now Feudalism was instituted to be useful in war. The Burmese customs were instituted that men should live in comfort and ease during peace; they were useless in war. So the natural leaders of a people, as in other countries, were absent. There were no local great men; the governors were men appointed from time to time from Mandalay and usually knew nothing of their charges. There were no rich men; no large land-holders—not one.

"There still remained, however, one institution, namely, the organisation of religion. For Buddhism is fairly well organised. It has its heads of monasteries, its Gaing-dauks, its Gaing-oks and, finally, the Thathanabaing, the head of the Burmese Buddhism. This was an organisation in touch with the whole people, revered and honoured by every man, woman and child in the country. In this terrible scene of anarchy and confusion . . . what were the monks doing?

". . . To those coming to Burma in those days, fresh from the teachings of Europe, remembering recent events in history, ignorant of what Buddhism means, there was nothing more surprising than the fact that in this war religion had no place. They rode about and saw the country full of monasteries; they saw the monasteries full of monks, whom they called priests; they saw that the people were intensely attached to their religion; they had daily evidence that Buddhism was an abiding faith in the hearts of the people. And yet, for all the assistance it was to them in the war the Burmese might have had no faith at all.

"The explanation is that the teachings of Buddha forbid war. All killing is wrong, all war is hateful, nothing is more terrible than destroying your fellow men. . . . Be pure and kind-hearted, full of charity and compassion, and so you may do good to others. These are the vows the Buddhist monks make; these are the vows they keep.

". . . I remember a friend of mine with whom I went through many experiences speaking of it with scorn. He was a cavalry officer—the model of a light cavalry officer. 'What is the use,' said my friend, 'of this religion? Suppose these men had been Jews, Hindus or Mussulmen, it would have been a very different business. These yellow-robed monks would have paraded the country preaching against us and organising. No one organises better than an ecclesiastic. We should have had them leading their men into action with sacred banners and promising them heaven when they died. . . . What is the use of Buddhism?'

"So, or something like this, spoke my friend. . . . He knew nothing of Buddhism. . . . (the Buddhist) could count on no help in breaking the everlasting laws that the Buddha had revealed to us. If he went to his monks they would say, 'See the law, the unchangeable law that man is subject to. There is no good thing but peace, no sin like strife and war. . . . The law is the same for all. There is not one law for you and another for the foreigner; there is not one law for to-day and another for to-morrow. Truth is for ever and for ever.'

"You might as well say to gravity, 'I want to lift this stone; please don't act on it for a time' as expect Buddhism to assist you to make war. Buddhism is the unalterable law of righteousness and cannot ally itself with evil, cannot ever be persuaded that under any circumstances evil can be good. . . . There is no flexibility in Buddhism. It is a law and nothing can change it. The law of the Buddhist is against war—war of any kind at all—and there can be no exception. And so every Burman who fought against us knew that he was sinning. He did it with his eyes open; he could not imagine any exception in his favour. Never could he, in his bivouac, look at the stars and imagine that any power looked down in approbation of his deeds. . . . Our bayonets or lances were no

keys to open to him the gates of paradise; no monks could come and close his dying eyes with promises of reward to come. He was sinning, and he must suffer long and terribly for this breach of the laws of righteousness.

"But it must never be forgotten that, if this faith does not assist the believer in defence, neither does it in offence. What is so terrible as a war of religion? There can never be a war of Buddhism. No ravished country has ever borne witness to the prowess of the followers of Buddha; no murdered men have poured out their blood on their hearthstones, killed in his name. No ruined women have cursed his name to high heaven. He and his faith are clean of the stain of blood. He was the preacher of the Great Peace, of love, of charity, of compassion; and so clear is his teaching that it can never be misunderstood. Burmese have fought, but they have never fought in the name of their faith. They have never been able to prostitute its teachings to their own wants. Whatever the Burmese have done, they have kept their faith pure. When they have offended against the laws of Buddha they have done so openly. Their souls are guiltless of hypocrisy, for whatever that may avail them; they have known the difference between good and evil, even if they have not always followed the good.

". . . There was this very remarkable fact in Burma: that when you left the King you dropped at once to the villager. There were no intermediate classes. There were no nobles, hereditary officers, great landowners, wealthy bankers or merchants. . . . If a man discovered a method of working silver, say, he never hid it, but made it common property. It is very curious how absolutely devoid Burma is of exclusiveness of caste, so universal in India, and which survives to a great extent in Europe. The Burman is so absolutely enamoured of freedom that he cannot abide the bonds which caste demands. He will not bind himself with other men for a slight temporal advantage. He does not consider it worth the trouble. He prefers remaining free and poor to being bound and rich. Nothing is further from him than the feeling of exclusiveness. He abominates secrecy, mystery. His religion, his women, like himself, are free. He is ready that everything should be known, that all men should be brothers.

"And all the people are on the same level. Richer and poorer there are, of course, but there are no very rich; there is none so poor that he cannot get plenty to eat and drink. Money to him is worth what it will buy. . . . With us, when we have made a little money, we keep it as a nest-egg to make more from. After his own little wants are satisfied, after he has bought himself a new silk, after he has bought his wife a gold bangle, after he has called his village together and entertained them with a dramatic entertainment—sometimes even before all this—he will spend the rest on charity."

[NOTE BY EDITOR.—What a backward people! They did not know even the valuable mines there were in their own country. No one can be surprised that Britain took over the country. It may be taken as what may happen to a small people that do not appreciate Christianity and the benefits of British economics. Needless to say, the Burmese have learned a lot since 1889. Realising this, we may presently give more of the Burmese outlook on life as seen by Mr. Fielding-Hall. Is it possible that we might learn something?]

THE WITCH (For V.C.B.)

Poor, poor, Pierronne,
Alas, she is gone,
They burned her in the end;
They thought it was most odd
That she said she spoke to God
As friend with friend.

All clemency past,
Avowing to the last
Her friendship with the Lord,
She described His grand apparel
In fullness and in detail,
His golden chain and sword.

Described His kingly face,
His carriage and His grace—
She could make no mistake;
But they called her "Silly Bitch,"
And tried her as a witch,
And burned her at the stake.

Her chain was not of gold,
But rusty iron cold,
Which soon would be red hot;
And when she felt the flame
She called upon His Name—
He would forsake her not.

Poor, poor, Pierronne,
Alas, she is gone,
In the market-place she died;
They led her out to die,
But never told her why
His friendship they denied.

But Holy Church is wise,
It knew the girl told lies,
Or was at least mistaken;
For were the Lord her friend
He would save her in the end,
She would not be forsaken.

Oh, Holy Church is wise,
God's friendship it denies,
He is no friend of Man;
He acts more like a devil,
For all around is evil,
Yea, since the world began.

He is cruel and contrary,
And His Mother, that is Mary,
Is often asked to plead
With Him her callous Son,
Content to hear men groan,
To let His children bleed.

The Christian's jealous God,
Who smites men with His rod,
Is an Almighty Fiend;
And His propitiation
The duty of the nation
From normal friendship weaned.

For this the Church knows well,
That Heaven is really Hell,
In which there reigns a devil;
Its priests must sacrifice
By every known device
To save mankind from evil.

This simple country lass,
Raised in a lowly class,
Whose head a book had turned,
She thought her God a Lamb;
But He didn't care a damn,
He let the girl be burned.

The Holy Church is wise,
It does not deal in lies,
Is not imposed upon;
The clergy know their Lord,
With His Fire, and Chain and Sword:
Poor, poor, Pierronne.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

THE Archbishop of Canterbury solemnly—although he must grin inwardly—thinks, or says, that "the Church schools are specially fitted to embody the best ideals of education." If the leaders of every sect or party in this country were as impudent as Dr. Temple, each might say the same of their own party, Church or movement. As it is, they are content with advocating a form of education which shall embody general principles to which all citizens can subscribe, and leave a number of parties to fight with each other in what is recognised as a legitimate manner. Dr. Temple and abettors play a different game. Unfortunately, the Archbishop appears to be receiving the help of the Government. We are not surprised. This is a Tory Government, and the Tory alliance with the Church is a very old one.

By the way, has anyone counted the number of Members of Parliament who have made themselves notorious by asking troublesome questions, and who have received an appointment afterwards? And, of course, once they have a Government job, no more questions may be asked. What Prime Minister was it who, more than a century ago, said that every member had his price? The certain thing is, no matter what kind of a Government we have, that when a very large proportion of members either hold office or are looking for appointments, the dice are heavily loaded against justice to the general community. They say they have adopted a "political career." Probably they do little more than want a profitable occupation.

Lord Vansittart explains his position in the "Yorkshire Post" to all those who believe that there are actually members of Germany's 80 millions who are quite decent human beings. He says that if during the inter-war period between 1918 and 1939, "my views had been heeded there would have been no war. If I am again written off as cavalierly as by the Bishop (of Bradford), there will be another war and the end of civilisation." So the salvation of the world really depends upon Lord Vansittart. We wonder what our Archbishop and God Almighty think of the position.

The "British Weekly," an organ of Presbyterianism (June 11), in dealing with the treatment of religion in Russia, asks "whether, while the Bolsheviks proclaim Atheism, Christians could support their revolution?" The answer must be by way of a question: "Why not?" Our own Government gives very obvious support to Christianity; would Christians hold that therefore Atheists would be justified in plotting against the Government by what is recognised the world over as treasonable methods? Christians in Russia were not compelled to support Atheism, but they were—and particularly in a revolutionary period during which countries outside Russia were doing what they could to upset the revolution—quite justified in looking after the plots which it is now admitted were being hatched by the "white clergy."

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland says he "would be glad to see Christian education forced on the people of all conquered countries." And what then? All the countries at war have had a Christian education forced upon them for many, many generations. With what result? Only that war

became more deadly and more brutal with the passing of the years; and now the only remedy these Christian leaders can suggest is more religion and increased power in the hands of religious leaders.

The religious adviser to the "Universe" declares with all solemnity that it is "not possible for the laity to receive the Blood of our Lord at Communion in capsules." We do not appreciate the difficulty. The miracle of transformation is performed by the priest. It is he who does the trick, and we have only his word that the trick has been performed. Why, then, cannot a priest transform a whole hoghead of wine into the blood of Jesus and then have it done up in little bottles for use? That seems to us quite a simple and adequate plan. The priest might safely challenge any chemist in the world to discover any difference in colour or taste to the blood that is served up in the orthodox manner; and it must be borne in mind that there are quite a number of things that are blessed by the priests, and which, being blessed, have qualities they never possessed before.

As an author God Almighty cannot be considered as a complete success. It is claimed that he wrote only one book, but ever since it has been in circulation there is no consensus of opinion as to what it meant. The Catholic says the truth is contained only in the version sanctioned by the Roman Church, and that all Protestant Bibles are demonstrably false and inadequate translations from what used to be called the Holy Bible before it became just "the Bible." Of course, authorship is a function that requires experience, like most other things, and as God is apparently just a single book author, one must expect flaws in the shape of obscurity, not to mention other blunders.

Perhaps God might have written a second edition of his book and, as Mrs. Eddy did with her book, so altered it that few would be able to trace the development of the divine book of the Christian scientists, but for the fact that his agents on earth have continually deceived him by giving misleading accounts of the status of his book. Year by year one of his block of agents issue reports that so many millions of his book are being printed, but he is not told that a large number of these are given away, and a great many of those who have it never read it. In any case, they do not tell the author that even this pseudo-sale is kept up only because a number of interests are perpetuated by keeping his book alive, because without it certain interests might otherwise find themselves wiped out.

Worse than all is the fact that behind the author's back—at any rate, without giving him the necessary information—his agents on earth have largely wiped his real book out of existence. The account he gave of the creation of the earth, of the making of man and woman, of how he introduced different forms of speech, what he wrote concerning the drowning of the whole of his people—with the exception of a mere handful—with a number of other detailed reminiscences of his early years, are all set on one side as not being true. In fact, his agents, in order to keep up the sales, have, to all intents and purposes, wiped out his book altogether. For it is obvious that if a book contains a certain number of statements so twisted about as to mean something entirely different from what they did mean, then it is substantially a new book.

Someone ought to tell God all about it. He is being misled and misrepresented by his principal agents. They are selling his book under false pretences. They are informing the people that God did not really know how to express himself. It is too much. Once upon a time, so says the Bible, God walked on the earth. If he were only to take a walk to some of our publishers and discover that, while they sell his book as it was issued, they have a large number of books pointing out its blunders and the necessary corrections, he would have plenty of grounds for legal action.

What unadulterated rubbish does appear, not merely in the Press, but in books, for which there is less excuse. There is a report in one of the local papers, of a lecture given in the Church of the Sacred Heart, Morden, on "Judaism." Probably the

lecturer thought she was very generous when she said there must be a national home for the Jews, "a nation of 16 millions could hardly be left without a local habitation." That is plain, irremovable and dangerous nonsense. There is no such thing as a Jewish nation. It is probable there never was such a "nation"; there certainly has been no "Jewish nation" for nearly 2,000 years.

There are and have been Palestinian, Hindoo, Chinese, Italian, Greek, German, Polish, Russian, English and French Jews, with many other nationalities. But there is no such thing as a Jewish nationality. There is a Jewish religion, which embraces representatives of practically all nations, as there are Christians, black, white and yellow; and it is doing the Jews a further injury by trying to convert them into a nation at a time when nationality is so evidently on trial as an authoritative and final analysis of humanity.

The curse of the Jew has always been his religion. Heine said that when one accuses Christians of persecuting Jews the Christian might well retort, presuming he had sufficient wit, the Jews began it. For the Jew gave the Christian his God, and that was taking revenge in anticipation of the Christian brutality to the Jew. Jews were driven together by persecution, and while persecution drives people together, and so develops good qualities of its own, it also attaches people the more to the very thing for which they are persecuted. Whatever other causes may have operated, the Jew has suffered for his religion; and with the same reservation, the Christian sanctified his sustained hatred by his religion. If Christians and Jews could wake up one morning with all thoughts of Judaism and Christianity banished from their minds, both would be the better for it. As that is not likely to happen, all those who wish humanity well must fall back on the slower method of hastening the operation of genuine cultural forces.

Commander Bower, M.P., deserves the congratulations of Freethinkers for publicly expressing in a recent speech an oft-forgotten fact. The Commander was criticising the tendency almost to deify Mr. Churchill, as the national leader, when he pointed out that international figures are made, not born. "If you will make me Minister of Information, with no more than his present powers over the Press and the B.B.C., I will guarantee to make a sack of potatoes into an international figure inside of a fortnight." This was a lesson insisted on many years ago by Herbert Spencer. Commander Bower added that we were a democracy, and true democracies should be suspicious of so-called great men. "We want no Fuehrers here," he said, "and when I say that I mean not only Mr. Churchill, but Mr. J. B. Priestley, Mr. W. J. Brown and the like as well." What prompted Commander Bower to make this plain statement of democratic thought we do not know. We earnestly hope that he was completely sincere, and that he will approve our addition to his list of suspicious great men—Archbishops, Cardinals, Bishops and the like.

The General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland agreed that with regard to the "New Order," the Church should speak clearly. Well, it has. So have all the other Churches, and it is the only point on which all the Churches agree. This is that in any social order the Church must occupy the front place. How much clearer can any Church make the position? In a world where religion generally is a decaying force the demand is that the Churches shall rule. They might as well demand the restoration of the Ptolemaic astronomy.

Speaking at the annual meeting of the National Society at Caxton Hall, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as reported in the "Schoolmaster" of June 11, said that "education is only adequate and worthy when it is religious. Education must be either religious or Atheistic." We think that declaration is worth remembering. It may help to expose some of the bugging and misleading statements that will be made when the matter comes fairly and squarely before Parliament.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

D. FISHER.—You can hardly think worse than we do of most European wars. But with all that, and no matter what proportion of blame rightly falls upon the other European "powers" for the state of Germany that led up to the war, the glaring fact is that the war is here and the issues are vitally different from most other wars. Submission means slavery for those who survive. And if and when we survive we shall deserve the slavery we may miss if we do not put it out of the power of groups in this and other countries to work the evil they have unquestionably worked.

"FREETHINKER" WAR DAMAGE FUND.—W. Collins, £2 2s.; W. A. Rose, 8s.

"PLEBIAN SOCIALIST."—We cannot print anonymous letters. Please send name and address (not necessarily for publication).

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. 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

THE National Federation of Class Teachers at its Annual Conference unanimously passed the following resolution:—

"This Conference reiterates its opposition to the imposition of Religious Tests, either directly or indirectly, on Teachers, and pledges its members to resist to the uttermost any attempt to impose them. It expresses its determination to oppose any attempt to increase clerical influence in the schools and reaffirms its belief that the abolition of the Dual System is a necessary condition of educational progress."

Good! provided that it means all it says, which should include a determined opposition to the confessed aims of the Church, and the teachers will fight the Board of Education if necessary. Otherwise the Churches may get all they require in the name of "freedom." As we have often said, the teachers, if they will only stand up, can command the situation.

We are asked to announce that Mr. T. M. Mosley, of 16, Cornhill Road, Carlton, Notts., is willing to undertake open-air Freethought meetings at Long Eaton, Ilkeston, Mansfield and other nearby places. There must be many Freethinkers in this area that would be willing to co-operate. Those so inclined must write direct to Mr. Mosley. He is willing and, as we know, able.

We like to see manifestations of liberality; and it is therefore interesting to note, now that there is no longer a "basic" allowance of petrol, that there is to be an allowance for the purpose of attending Church. One wonders why these pious people who own cars cannot say their prayers at home and do all their worshipping of God in their own bedrooms, or any other room

in their home. But if this were done the parsons would be out of a job—and that must never occur. It has also been arranged that bishops, and clergymen of lesser status, should have sufficient petrol for their needs. Splendid! The better-off Christian who owns a car, can roll up to his favourite church at the front entrance, while the bishop or clergyman rolls up at the back porch. Inside, they can meet face to face as brothers of the new Petroleum (Privileged People) Order, wearing serene, superior smiles, and confirming one another in their conviction that Christianity is a wonderful blessing—for some people. Then they can all roll home again, perhaps taking a rather longer route than necessary and calling at some quiet little farmhouse to see if God has provided any surplus eggs or butter for his praying playboys. "Sich nice people, you know," says Mrs. Giles to her husband as the well-laden car hums off down the road. "So God-fearing; and they go to church every Sunday."

Meanwhile, John (Plain) Citizen sweats at his machine, or in the blackness of the pit, or tugs at the wheel of his ten-tonner, putting in endless hours of dreary overtime, God-damning Hitler, and doing all he can to win the war—for the Christian way of life? Petrol for parsons; yes, "as much as they need." Yet we know coal merchants, bakers, grocers, milkmen and so on who are honestly crying out for more because they have not what they need to deliver the necessaries of life. Did somebody say we are flogging a dead horse and that religion has no power to-day? Think again, Buddy.

The Minister of Information was asked in the House of Commons whether he had taken steps to acquaint the Pope that Roman Catholic priests were still being ill-used in Germany. Mr. Bracken replied that he had no means of communicating with the Pope. Humbug seems almost as inseparable from politics as it is to keep out of religion in a civilised community. There is the wireless. Why could not a special message be sent to the Pope through that medium? It would be, we suppose, too straightforward to give the sensible reply that the Pope already knows all about the persecution of Roman Catholic priests in Germany—which is, of course, the case. Why not ask Cardinal Hinsley to transmit the message?

Debating Societies will soon be preparing the winter syllabus, and Freethinkers who may be members are asked to bring to the notice of their committees that the National Secular Society is prepared to send speakers to expound the Freethought position for discussion. Wherever such speakers have been sent all present agreed that an interesting evening was spent in discussing from an angle not usually dealt with.

In view of Tobruk, we humbly suggest that in future military enterprises the chiefs in command should be made up of representatives of the Allied Forces—at least composed of British, Russian and American leaders. If we are Allies we should at least get the benefit of the combination.

RUM AND RELIGION

We had for our chaplain a zealous Presbyterian minister, Mr. Beatty, who complained to me that the men did not generally attend his prayers and exhortations. When they enlisted they were promised, besides pay and provisions, a gill of rum a day, which was punctually served out to them, half in the morning and the other half in the evening, and I observed they were punctual in attending to receive it; upon which I said to Mr. Beatty, "It is perhaps below the dignity of your profession to act as steward of the rum, but if you were only to distribute it out after prayers you would have them all about you." He liked the thought, undertook the task, and, with the help of a few hands, to measure out the liquor, executed it to satisfaction, and never were prayers more generally and more punctually attended. So that I think this method preferable to the punishment inflicted by some military laws for non-attendance on divine service.—"The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin."

JOHN DONNE

The Muses' garden with pedantic weeds
O'erspread, was purged by thee, the lazy seeds
Of servile imitation thrown away,
And fresh invention planted. . . .

—CAREW on Donne.

THOMAS CAREW was Donne's contemporary; he knew and idolised the older man, facts that make us wary of overvaluing his panegyrics. Still, Carew was himself a graceful and fastidious poet, hardly likely to let his enthusiasms be untempered by critical judgment. It is therefore with some surprise that we note that in 1861 F. T. Palgrave could compile a "Golden Treasury" of English lyrics in which Donne's "fresh inventions" were unplaced. In the cold language of ordinals we must infer from Palgrave's selection that he considered Donne's rank to be not higher than 78th in the catalogue of poets. In other words and to all intents and purposes, total eclipse. Even in 1904, five years after Edmund Gosse's disinterment and revaluation of Donne's work, a prominent *littérateur* referred to its having "vanished from general view."

Well, the general view seems to have expanded in recent years. Pick up any modern anthology and not only will you find several Donnian contributions, but very likely the preface will reverentially commend them to your special attention. To understand, or—to speak more cautiously—to guess at the causes of the changing posthumous fortunes of the poet, would necessitate more inquiry than can be attempted here. But we may hazard that initially they were bound up with the authority of Dr. Johnson's hopelessly academic school of literary thought, and later, as we bear in mind that Donne was realistic, "harsh" (his own description) and anti-sentimental, with the rise of romanticism and the consequent development of poetic tastes to which his vivid, turbulent lines were as Napoleonic brandy to a rechabite. To-day, however, beset with realism from all sides, we are the more readily able to appreciate John Donne.

This curious man lived contemporaneously with a galaxy of exciting poets—and knew them not. Of his, and therefore Shakespeare's fellow writers, he seems to have had intercourse with Ben Jonson alone. His indifference to the literary coteries sprang from the good and sufficient reason that he was neither a professional nor an ambitious author: his versification was largely personal, a genuine method of relieving his all-too-often pent-up feelings. Moreover, he was impatient with current poetic fashions: his boast was that he

. . . never stoop'd so low, as they
Which on an eye, cheek, lip, can prey,
Seldom to them, which soar no higher
Than virtue or the mind to admire.

His biography, compressed, runs: Born of prosperous Catholic parents, he soon displayed a scholarly yet lively mind, turned Protestant early in life—mainly, it appears, for selfish reasons—travelled, squandered a fortune, loved well and widely ("digg'd love's mine") and then married clandestinely. For years he had to endure poverty. Meanwhile, he fawned on the Court and the aristocracy in the vain hope of advancement. Eventually, as a *pis aller*, he took Holy Orders; and finally, after the death of his wife, who was worn-out with motherhood, he became a zealous Churchman, was made Dean of St. Paul's and, at the time of his death in 1631, was looking forward to a Bishopric. The three well-defined phases, licentious youth, worldly ambitious manhood and religious last years, are clearly reflected in his poetry.

His earliest work consisted of satires and love lyrics—but "love" has to be pretty widely interpreted, for you never know whether the next poem will be boisterous,

I can love both fair and brown,
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom
want betrays. . . .

or angry,

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let
me love. . . .

or cynical,

He is stark mad, who ever says,
That he hath been in love an hour. . . .

or tender,

Sweetest love, I do not go,
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter Love for me.

And the poetic quality ranges from the infelicity of
Good we must love, and must hate ill,
For ill is ill, and good good still,
to the strange beauty of

O more than Moon,
Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere,
Weep me not dead, in thine arms, but forbear
To teach the sea, what it may do too soon.

(Incidentally, note, in this quotation, the extraordinary unconscious anticipation of Newton implicit in the poetic fancy "draw not up seas" in an apostrophe to the moon.) But nowhere do we encounter the over-dainty conceitisms, the cloying mellifluousities that even the best writers of the period found hard to avoid.

Thus Donne philandered and loved and suffered and wrote it all up, and at the same time could castigate himself for double foolery, for "loving and for saying so in whining poetry." A complicated nature was his.

The unfavourable social consequences of his marriage sharply changed all this. A contemptible sycophancy inspired nearly all the verse of the next phase: he who once wrote with fine scorn:—

Oh, let me not serve so, as those men serve

Whom honour's smokes at once fatten and starve;

now served with zeal. But honour's smoke was not to fatten; it just starved.

And so, the Church. A few more years, then death, feared and fascinated by Donne all his life, took his wife, snapping his last link with worldly preoccupations. Gradually, hesitatingly, he gave himself up to religion, expressing himself as of old in poetry. In particular he composed 19 Holy Sonnets.

It is perhaps an advantage to be able to digest these remarkable sonnets outside the refectories of Christianity. A more candid and analytical attitude is possible—and ultimately a purer appreciation. Reading, with find that Donne (the quondam lady killer) again and again addresses his God—his very personal God—as a passionate, lovesick woman might her timid lover, and we marvel at the fervid intensity of the diction. Here is no pious be-cloistered hymnodist, but a racked being, urging his tormentors to redouble their efforts, fearing death as he invites its approach, finding a masochistic ecstasy in his tortures. His fierce openings hammer the keynotes:—

Batter my heart, three person'd God. . . .

Oh my black Soul! now thou art summoned

By sickness, death's herald, and champion. . . .

At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angels. . . .

Spit in my face you Jews, and pierce my side,
Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,
For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd. . . .

The theme, divorced from its medium, is that of the poor Salvation Army penitent or the rich Buchmanite convert. But "married to immortal verse," clothed in a jagged impassioned beauty, it mysteriously transcends banality and makes us forget psychological interpretations. In few other ways can so deep an

insight be obtained into the dangerous pleasures of religious fanaticism as in dwelling on these powerful sonnets. Vicariously we participate; we indulge ourselves and shudder and wonder, not knowing whether to be the more thankful for our own normality or for the genius of Donne that makes insight so real. This, after all, is the true function of art and Donne thereby proves himself a great poet whose work will carry his fame across and beyond as many periods of "unfashionableness" as we like to introduce.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

FREETHOUGHT PADRES?

WHAT, I wonder, are the reactions of the average Freethinker who has failed to switch off before one of the more enlightened religious speakers comes over the air?

The other night I listened, in company with a Christian friend, to the "Radio Padre" giving one of his regular evening addresses. He spoke mainly to the Forces and war workers generally, and his subject was "Happiness." After it was over, my friend turned to me almost accusingly with the remark: "Well, I'll be interested to know when one of your Freethinkers gives a message like that." I had no answer. For with the strains of the speaker's sincere, cultured tones still in my ears, any carping innuendo aimed at the several implied absurdities and time-worn shibboleths which crept so little into his almost purely human message would have been frank vulgarity. Many people in these grim days must have drawn comfort both from the manly yet gentle appeals this man made, and his poetic approach to the subject, and whatever the doctrinary implications, one was left with the feeling that though the talk was merely part of the man's job, for which he was no doubt well paid, to have switched him off at the beginning or half-way through would have been to lose something not easily replaced. I hope and trust that there were not those amongst us who happened to hear this man and remained entirely untouched. Sentiment. Perhaps. The lure of rhetoric—who knows? Not long ago, Canon Elliott, I think it was, took over the programme entitled "South Sea Island Discs," in which it is imagined that the speaker is isolated on a lonely island and has the choice of eight records for his only means of consolation, a radiogramme, which presumably was the one item of his luggage which was cast ashore with him at the time. Consider the comfort of such opening remarks as Elliott thought fit to preface in his deep, friendly voice, the playing of the first tune, "I'll Walk Beside You." It was chosen, he said, because in his rôle as shipwrecked mariner he was presumed to be alone; "and as we all know," he went on, "no man is ever alone." It seemed to Elliott, no doubt possessed of a taste for the best music and the best songs, that this simple, popular ballad just filled the bill and would, in fact, perhaps be his first choice as he sought to allieviate the loneliness of his sudden isolation. "No man is ever alone"—there is always Christ. The records were continued, each with some attractive and appropriate introduction couched in terms of warmth and appreciation till, at the end, the quiet blessing.

Now what is it that I am trying to say? The subject has given me much thought of late, and seems, in the last analysis, to resolve itself like this.

In the absence of religion are we to lose the inestimable value of such preachers as these in their self-appointed rôle, not only as practical moralists, but artists in the finer shades and attributes of life? Or putting it another way, what do Freethinkers propose to do in replacing them so that the troubled and vexed masses may still pause at times to listen to the voice of their cultural leaders when the mood and the weariness of the daily struggle call for something other than cold dialectics or the endless thrashing of partisan thought? To this I can find no

satisfactory answer, unless it be that in the fullness of time the Freethought Movement may hope to enlist the services of such men as Elliott and the "Radio Padre," freed from their dogma, strengthened by their emancipation from the necessity to pay lip service to an outworn doctrine, yet retaining their innate humanity and the power of personality now devoted to the narrow cause.

For after all, a Freethinker with the voice and appeal of Canon Elliott could well meet all the requirements of what I have come to believe an indispensable rôle. One can imagine, for instance, in just such a programme as the above, it could be said with overwhelming conviction and with greater truth, that however small the island, however far the hope of rescue, no man is ever alone. How can he be—a part of Nature, nursed in the living environment of Nature from which he is inseparable? Whilst in all truth there are few of us who, in actual presence or in memory and distant loyalty, have not someone, perhaps many, who would walk beside them, through the past and coming years, and wish them the blessing which even we as Freethinkers can accept with gratitude, not from the "Christ in them" these kindly and well-meaning speakers, but from what I truly believe to be their own good hearts.

Thus, though an uncompromising Freethinker myself, I can be counted out from those who choose unthinkingly to condemn and deride the host of humble Christian preachers who, though handicapped by their doctrine, are sincerely doing all they can within the narrow limits of Christian ethics to create a better and a kinder world. Where we smile, in such cases, one feels we should not unthinkingly decry. Every Freethinker has his own idea of the good life, and his own special appreciation of the values, and whilst it is one of the greatest assets of Freethought that it does not necessarily subscribe to any one fixed code of conduct, it has been largely on account of this that the movement can provide so few moralists and ethical leaders capable of influencing others by their oratory or writings. The need, I think, is great. Who will fill it? Who in the name of Freethought will take it upon himself to provide the blessing and comfort through leadership for which there seems such insistent need?

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

A PREDECESSOR OF THE BRAINS TRUST, AND A DIGRESSION

THE entertainment provided by the Brains Trust often reminds me of one which was popular in the days of my youth—the Christy Minstrels, who, like the Trust, "never performed out of London." Among these coloured comedians were certain humorists known as "corner men," who interchanged questions and answers much as the interlocutors of the Trust do to-day.

These Minstrels, for long one of the "sights" of London, were, with the Crystal Palace and Madame Tussaud's, the delight of country cousins. But they and their songs, humorous and sentimental, the echoes of which must still linger in many English homes, have vanished like Prospero's pageant . . . nor left a rack behind. Inevitable change besets amusements, and many which I regarded once as permanent institutions have passed away; as an instance, those ubiquitous and popular entertainers, the "Niggers," are unknown to the present generation. No seaside resort in the holiday season was without several of these troupes with their accompaniment of bones, banjo, tambourine and, sometimes, a harp.

Their songs were bright, tuneful and not without humour. Some old folks may remember these favourites: "Pretty Polly Perkins of Paddington Green," "The Captain with his Whiskers," "Cerulea was Beautiful," "La-di-da" and that pathetic ballad, "Ben Bolt," which Du Maurier resuscitated in "Trilby."

But the "black" has for long been out of fashion, and the once popular songs and "business" of the "Niggers" would, as an old performer sorrowfully remarked to me not long ago, fail to amuse an audience nowadays. One familiar figure which I have missed of late is that of Mr. Punch, the gay Lothario of our streets, who with his "jolie companye," used to delight both young and old.

The cast has varied from time to time, and the libretto, too; Polly, the Devil, the unhappy child (nameless and sex unknown), Hector, and even Toby are sometimes to seek, and the old songs to the tunes of "Malbroug," "Water Parted from the Sea" and "Green Grow the Rashes," are heard no more.

The disappearance of the itinerant German bands, which must "have left their country for their country's good," is not an occasion for regret; they certainly did not charm our isle with "sounds and sweet airs." These aliens, who were dressed in a sort of uniform consisting of a blouse and kepi, used to perform on ponderous brass instruments with a melancholy as deep as that of the Hebrews when they sang their "Songs of Zion in a strange land."

The German bands and many other performers *al fresco* were intolerable; but one is a pleasant memory. Long ago I have listened many times to a girl with a sweet voice who used to sing in the streets and squares of the West End in the quiet summer evenings, that halcyon time when fashionable London was out of town. She accompanied herself with a guitar, and it was then that I heard first Clement Scott's charming song, the "Garden of Sleep." It appealed to me, for I had known that poppyland well. Alas! the garden, the graves in the grass and the ruined tower at the edge of the steep now lie beneath the insatiable sea. But I have strayed far from the Brains Trust; to Victorian times when the grandfather of its most distinguished member was still with us. At the rooms of the Royal Society of Arts in the Adelphi I once had the privilege, the distinction, of meeting Thomas Henry Huxley. But a nos moutons, if I may call them so.

The fixed stars of the Brains Trust galaxy are Professor Huxley, Dr. Joad and Commander Campbell. The scientific expositions of the Professor are always interesting and they often serve to correct the occasional exuberance of his colleagues. Dr. Joad, who seems to experience as much difficulty in excluding theological references from his discourse as Mr. Dick did in keeping King Charles' head out of his memorial, has given us some remarkable information concerning ghosts and poltergeists. Commander Campbell, who seems to be the acknowledged humorist of the Trust, provides what was known in the profession as "comic relief," and has many amusing reminiscences of the days when he "braved the battle and the breeze." His poem, "Well, when I was in. . ." is the prelude to a good yarn, and if the Commander does at times stretch our credulity a little, is there not a prescriptive privilege accorded to sailors and fishermen! The weekly interlude afforded by these learned folk is always welcome; they are, after all, probably much like that "reg'lar knock down o' talent," the select footmen of Bath, who were found by Mr. Sam Weller to be "sich uncommon nice men."

EDGAR SYERS.

THE DEVIL

Take the Devil from our religion and the entire fabric falls. No Devil, no fall of man. No Devil, no atonement. No Devil, no hell.

The Devil is the keystone of the arch.

And yet for many years the belief in the existence of the Devil—of evil spirits—has been fading from the minds of intelligent people. This belief has now substantially vanished. The minister who now seriously talks about a personal Devil is regarded with a kind of pitying contempt.

The Devil has faded from his throne and the evil spirits have vanished from the air.

The man who has really given up a belief in the existence of the Devil cannot believe in the inspiration of the New Testament—in the divinity of Christ. If Christ taught anything, if he believed in anything, he taught a belief in the existence of the Devil. His principal business was casting out devils. He himself was taken possession of by the Devil and carried to the top of the temple.

Thousands and thousands of people have ceased to believe the account in the New Testament regarding devils, and yet continue to believe in the dogma of "inspiration" and the divinity of Christ.—INGERSOLL.

OBITUARY

SIGMUND KAUFMANN

The older school of Socialists will remember Sigmund Kaufmann whose death has just taken place in his 84th year. Sixty years of his life were spent in that cause during which his Freethought opinions were always given prominence.

Strength of mind and independence of thought were strong features in his character. He attracted many friends, and there was always a warm welcome for the many progressive-minded visitors to his home. His wish for cremation and a Secular Service were loyally carried out, and before an assembly of relatives and friends some selected lines from a favourite author were feelingly read by a son-in-law, Mr. W. A. Rose, in the Crematorium at Golders Green on Thursday, 18th June, and the service was read by the General Secretary, N.S.S.

R. H. R.

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.

West London N.S.S. Branch (Hyde Park), Thursday, 7-0, Mr. E. C. SAPHIN; Sunday, 3-0, various speakers.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), 11.0, J. McCABE.—America and Japan.

COUNTRY

Indoor

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

Outdoor

Blyth (The Fountain), Monday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.
Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), Saturday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Edinburgh N.S.S. Branch (The Mound), Sunday, 7-30, Mrs. M. I. WHITEFIELD (Glasgow).

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

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

North Shields (Harbour View), Thursday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.