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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

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### Man and His Religion

IN writing these notes on Christianity we have had two things in view. One is that Christianity is an historic religion, and therefore, if we are to understand it, we must go back to its origin and trace it through the official and authoritative form it assumed in history. We must not accept the form that contemporary Christianity has now assumed under pressure of contemporary knowledge. The second point, and a very pertinent one, is that there is not a single important feature of Christianity—real Christianity—that cannot be found in substance in the beliefs and customs of primitive peoples now existing. Seventy years of modern anthropology has taught us more about the origin and nature of religion than all the creeds and practices of established Christian Churches. Without this background an understanding of Christian beliefs and practices is impossible. With it, not merely Christianity, but all other forms of religion, take their place in the story of the development of the human mind. Religious apologetics from professional believers are not explanations of why people believe in gods and devils, in heaven and hell, they are mere excuses to go on believing. The study of rudimentary structures in the human body, which points to man's animal ancestry, has its mental parallel in the survival of ideas and beliefs that can be traced back to the undeveloped intelligence of the human group. As Winwood Reade reminded us, we have tailed minds as well as tailed bodies, and if we do not actually believe in ghosts, most of us are afraid of them.

### God, Man and Nature

Historic Christianity, in the main, held that the world was made out of nothing. God said "Let there be—"

This series of notes is in reply to a question: "What is Christianity?" There are so many forms of Christianity, we declined the task of answering. But Christianity is an historic religion based upon the Bible. The clergy are crying: "Back to the Bible." We take them at their word, and give the essentials of Christianity as presented in the Bible.

and it was. It was also believed that prior to the sin of Adam and Eve every form of life was perfect and harmless. A great Catholic writer wrote that "When Adam ate the forbidden fruit the whole face of *nature* was transformed."

"No created thing would have been hurtful to man had he not sinned; they became hurtful for the sake of terrifying and punishing vice or for proving and perfecting virtue; they were created harmless, and on account of sin became hurtful."

This view was generally accepted until about a century and a half ago. As late as the eighteenth century John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, declared that "sin is the moral cause of earthquakes," and there are multitudes of Christians who to-day attribute plagues or earthquakes to our neglect of God. Further,

"Before the sin of Adam there were no agitations within the bowels of the earth, no violent convulsions, no concussions of the earth, no earthquakes, but all were unmoved as the pillars of the heavens. There were no such things as eruptions of fire, no volcanoes, no burning mountains."

From the same source we learn that there was no predatory or bloodthirsty instinct among animals until the fall of Adam. Before that

"None of these attempted to devour or in any way injure each other . . . The spider was as harmless as the fly and did not wait for blood."

Another famous theologian of the same period, Richard Watson, said:—

"We have no reason at all to believe that the animal had a serpentine form before Satan, in the guise of a serpent, tempted Eve; in any mode or degree until his transformation. That he was then degraded to a reptile to go upon his belly imports an entire alteration and loss of the original form."

This type of opinion is not quite dead to-day, and one suspects that many of the B.B.C. preachers would welcome its revival on a wide scale. It must be galling to some of them not to be able to even hint their regret that the vast majority of Christians have outgrown these speculations.

We have been indulging in a digression, but not one that is wholly irrelevant. We have been trying to recall, not the Christianity of some remote period, but the ideas for which Christianity stood a little over a century ago. The Bible was then read and believed. To-day the plain sense of its message no longer appeals to multitudes of professing Christians. Here is an example of what Christianity was. It is from Dean Burgon—mid-nineteenth century:—

"The Bible is none other than the word of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every verse of it, every chapter of it, every word of it, every



syllable of it (Where are we to stop?), every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the word of God; not some part of it more and some part less, but the utterance of Him that sitteth on the throne, absolute, faultless, unerring, supreme."

To about the same period belongs the famous "Essays and Reviews" issued by a number of clergymen and prominent laymen who were getting ashamed of historic Christianity. That book drew forth a protest from 11,000 clergymen of the Church of England, who accepted, "without reserve or qualification, the inspiration and authority of the whole of the canonical scriptures as not only containing but being the word of God."

### Magic in Numbers

We must get back to the Bible account and our plain sketch of Biblical and historic Christianity. God the inconceivable and non-understandable had made the world and all therein in six days. The seventh day, making the full week, was a day off. Not that God required rest. Merely to say "Let there be—" and it was, could not have been very exhausting. It seems that God rested on the seventh day so that mankind might have a day set apart for worshipping him. The god that ceases to be worshipped soon ceases to exist. For a long, long time the praise motive was enough to secure the sanctity of the seventh day, although with characteristic cockeyedness the Christian Church turned the seventh day into the first—and God never appears to have noted the change. At the moment the Sabbath appears to have for its chief purpose the upkeep of the Lord's Day Observance Society and preventing actors being compelled to work seven days a week. It is argued that if theatres are closed on Sunday other theatrical displays are available, the Churches are open. And if the performances in Churches are neither as witty, as human, nor as healthily moral as the theatre, still they will provide peace of body without awakening or creating a tiring strain on the intellect.

Six days to make a world, one might say—although God appears to have forgotten it—a world of worlds, is good going. But why six days? The "Let there be—" process is quite independent of time. Again, for an explanation we are bound to turn back to "Our Father the savage," or if not to the savage as we find him to-day, to a stage in human history when primitive ideas were more openly expressed than they are to-day. We have already seen that the understanding of the first verse in the Gospel of St. John takes us back to a time when words had an "occult" power of their own. What about numbers? Well, we all know that with our surviving primitives the power exerted by the numbers seven and three, and also the unlucky quality of 13. In many streets in this country people still dodge the house numbered 13, and we believe that in some parts of the country it is not unusual to find that number wiped out altogether.

Three and seven are certainly magical numbers. So is six. St. Augustine warns us to be careful about this number. He points out it is quite wrong to believe that six is a sacred number because God finished his labours on the sixth day. The real explanation is that God finished on the sixth day because six is a word of "power." The distinction is important. Another one of the Fathers illustrates the magical quality of "six" by

pointing out that one, two and three, which total six, may be formed into a perfect triangle—and triangles played an important part in medieval magic.

Thus the six days of creation remained as the basis of the Christian cosmogony almost to our own time. Up to the last half of the nineteenth century theologians were fighting with scientists over this knotty point. With the early and medieval Christians—in fact, up to the end of the eighteenth century—the six-day creation was scarcely questioned. Martin Luther said, with his blunt outspokenness, "Moses spoke plainly when he said the world was made in six days." Calvin held the same view. Our existing Prayer Book backs it up. The Roman Church is loyal to it. The B.B.C. is not far from it when it is dealing with children—young and old. Then came the reign of "day" as an expanding period. One could make it whatever length one pleased. Modern piety is often very accommodating.

In passing we may note that some rather definite information was given concerning the winding-up of this creative period. Thus, the Rev. John Lightfoot, a noted Hebraic scholar and Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, proved that "Heaven and earth, centre and circumference, were created altogether in the same instant." This exactitude is important and impressive. It would have been awkward had God created a centre without a circumference or had given us a circumference without a centre. Dr. Lightfoot also passed on the valuable information that man was created by the *Trinity* on October 23, in the year 4000 B.C., at 9 o'clock in the morning.

There was, however, another calculation, accepted as correct by Pope Gregory XIII. This stated that the finish of creation was in the year 5199 B.C. The latest calculation is impressive. It descends to details. A careless calculator would have written the round figures 5200 and have done with it. But to stop at 5199 exhibits a faithfulness to details that is really impressive. But we still prefer Dr. Lightfoot. That "9 o'clock in the morning" shows a respect for exactitude that carries conviction with it.

We are afraid that these notes are extending much beyond the space we intended giving them. Our excuse is that we are dealing with historical Christianity, what it was until yesterday, and what it pretends to be—with the more enlightened, or the more artful to-day. After all, Christianity—honest Christianity—is a religion of the book, and unless we know what that book meant for centuries and the obstacle that it placed on the development of science and general culture, we shall never understand the Christianity that was or the Christianity that is. Of the two, we have the greater respect for the first. It was at least honest.

(To be continued.)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### REFORMERS

It is the practice of the mob first to stone and then to erect useless memorials to their greatest benefactors. All who set themselves to replace ancient error and superstition by truth and reason must lay their account with brickbats in their life and a marble monument after death.—SIR J. G. FRAZER.



## THE INCEPTION OF BRITAIN'S SEA SUPREMACY

NELSON'S naval victory at Trafalgar in 1805 secured Britannia's rulership of the waves for 100 years. No other Power could dispute her maritime supremacy at this period, and even the German Kaiser protested that he could render no assistance to the Boers during the South African War while Britain remained mistress of the seas. But with the subsequent expansion of the American, Japanese and German Fleets, the advent of the submarine, mines and, ultimately aircraft, a startling sea change has been effected, and the losses inflicted on surface craft by these deadly weapons attain a tremendous total in times of war.

Yet England, so long the premier maritime Power, was in earlier centuries quite insignificant on the sea. All the outstanding voyages of discovery were undertaken by foreign navigators. Columbus, Magellan, Vasco da Gama and the other famous pioneers were Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and, later, Hollanders. In sober truth, England was so much occupied and embarrassed by the Hundred Years' War with France—which, after great sacrifice of blood and treasure, left England at last without a solitary possession on the European Continent save Calais, and even this was ultimately surrendered—that other nations were enabled to lead the way in oceanic adventures.

With the close of the Wars of the Roses and the accession of a firm Tudor ruler, the faint beginnings of naval experiment were perceptible under Henry VII. At the commencement of his reign, English overseas commerce remained much as it had been under Edward III. As Dr. J. A. Williamson notes in his able essay, "England and the Opening of the Atlantic" ("Cambridge History of the British Empire," Vol. 1, 1929, Cambridge University Press): "The greater, or at least the richer part of it [commerce] was in the hands of foreigners—of the German Hansa and the Flemings to the eastward, and of the Italians and the Spaniards towards the west and south. Of English merchants there were two classes, the incorporated traders of the Staple and the Merchant Adventurers working across the straits of Dover and the North Sea, and the independent merchants trading with Ireland, Aquitaine, the Peninsula and occasionally perhaps with the Atlantic Islands and, at rare intervals, into the Mediterranean and the Levant. Some of these western or ocean men hailed from Bristol, the Devon towns and Southampton, but many belonged to London." Indeed, London played a prominent part in these transactions, and this probably explains the pronounced progress of the city on the Thames at this time.

The geographical science of Pagan Rome perished during the Christian Dark Ages, and its remnants were not restored until the Moslem Saracens reintroduced them into Southern Europe, while long years elapsed before they reached our northern isles. Italian and Iberian seamen thus became acquainted with charts completely unknown in England, and the southern communities enjoyed banking and other commercial advantages far superior to any we possessed. Again, in trading technique we were far surpassed by the industrious and enterprising merchants of the Flemish and Hansa settlements on the north European coasts.

Bristol appears to have been the pioneer centre of England's ocean voyages. That city's merchants were stimulated by the tidings of the triumphs of Columbus which had recently arrived. Henry VII. was induced to grant a patent to the Genoese navigator, John Cabot, in 1496 to enable him to sail north, east or west in search of undiscovered lands, and in preference to the opulent spice islands or the eastern shores of China and Japan. For it was now obvious that these delectable territories had not been reached by Columbus or his colleagues. Cabot's first voyage brought him to the north-east coasts of America, and he returned to England fully convinced that he had landed on the eastern shores of Asia. He sailed on his second enterprise hoping to reach China and Japan, and from this projected success great commercial gain was to be confidently anticipated. But this

sanguine expectation was painfully nullified. The rich prizes Cabot sought completely eluded him, for it was clear that "the continent beyond the ocean was not the Asia described in gorgeous detail by Marco Polo two centuries before."

Early in the 16th century several voyages of discovery were financed by Bristol merchants, but with very scanty success. Some of these expeditions were aided by small Crown grants, but as Dr. Williamson points out, the insignificant sums allotted stand in striking contrast to the money lavished on Court ceremonial or the heavy expenditure for war.

Under Henry VIII. a keener interest was shown in overseas commerce, and several expeditions sailed to Guinea and Brazil from Plymouth, London and Southampton. The Atlantic coasts of North America were also explored, but the bountiful cod fisheries of Newfoundland had been exploited by the French and Portuguese much before the English participated in the industry.

The main impulse of English activity in oceanic exploration was a natural envy of the wealth and influence the Portuguese had gained from their mercantile expeditions along the African coasts and in the countries of the Far East. Spain, on the other hand, drew most of her wealth from the West, and now, with an inspiring commercial outlook in England, the practical monopoly of oceanic commerce possessed by the Peninsular peoples was certain to be challenged by the hitherto backward islanders of Albion.

Although Henry VIII. displayed little real concern with overseas discovery, he well and truly laid the foundations for the future pre-eminence of British sea power. In our historian's words, "he built a first-class fighting Navy and devised a naval administration which had no equal in Europe for a century to come."

At this period the national spirit grew more and more aggressive, and the burdensome restrictions imposed by the Iberian authorities on international trading served to intensify antagonism. These protective devices were accompanied by religious rancour, and merchants from England and other anti-Romanist lands were subjected to painful disabilities in the Peninsula. "As the 16th century advanced," Dr. Williamson avers, "the difficulties besetting the English merchants in Spain became serious. . . . Piracy and privateering grew rampant; the Spanish secular laws were oppressive—English residents, for example, were not allowed to keep their private accounts in their own language; and the cruelties of the Inquisition, as Admiralty records show, were not such fables of Protestant polemic as has sometimes been alleged."

Oversea commerce with Brazil and Guinea was sustained until the Portuguese dispatched war vessels to terminate the traffic of English traders. The French, however, continued to menace the Iberian monopoly, and their rulers connived at the licit and illicit trading of their subjects.

The Navigation Act of 1540 in some measure enabled England to counteract the commercial rivalry of alien and enemy Powers. Her privateers seized Spanish, French and even Flemish cargo vessels on the pretext that they carried contraband commodities, while foreign treasure ships were captured by captains who offered no excuse at all. Incessantly plundered and perhaps somewhat calumniated by their foes, the pestilent Spaniards of Elizabethan days were no innovation. The intense hatred of the Iberian, as our historian reminds us, "began in the dungeons of the Inquisition and on the waters of the Bay and Channel before Henry VIII was dead; and it confirmed the Protestantism of the western adventurers and urged them to make common cause with the more experienced Huguenot freebooters from the ports of France."

Richard Chancellor sought a north-east passage to Cathay. He reached the White Sea and landed on its shores when, much to his surprise, he was informed that he was trespassing on Moscovite territory. Boldly declaring himself the appointed envoy



of the English Crown, he obtained an audience with Ivan the Terrible, when the Russian ruler welcomed the suggestion of commercial intercourse with his dominions. So the English Moscovy Company was incorporated, and this appears to have been the beginning of England's trading transactions with the immense Eastern State.

While Mary reigned all encroachments on Spanish preserves were officially forbidden, but, if surreptitiously, they continued as of old. Under her successor all overt restraint ended, and Elizabethan seadogs such as Drake and Hawkins became men of high renown. The Guinea Coast gold trade flourished, but sad to relate, the nefarious negro slave traffic with the Spanish settlers in the New World, in which the English largely participated, inaugurated the pitiless transport of these unfortunate Africans to the Western Continent, whose curse lingers on the Christian white man to this day.

Under Mary, England lost her last possession on the European Continent when Calais was retaken by the French. But this disaster served to strengthen the growth of our sea-girt island's Navy. This revival, however, proved transient, and during the first decade of Elizabeth's reign no further naval increase occurred. But by 1569, it was plainly apparent that the English Navy would prove quite incapable of coping with adverse circumstances should such arise. Its reorganisation was therefore undertaken and a splendid administrator was found in John Hawkins, while in Francis Drake England possessed a fearless and far-seeing seaman of the very first rank. Although in the naval conflict with Spain in 1588 England was favoured by the elements, yet her small, swiftly sailing ships proved more than a match for the unwieldy galleons of Spain which were to avenge the wrath of God on a heretic people.

T. F. PALMER.

## THE JEWISH QUESTION

SINCE the advent of Hitler the Jewish question has attained world-wide prominence, and it is deplorable that the anti-Semitic part of Hitler's foul creed has made considerable headway in England even amongst people who detest Fascism. The object of this article is to show that the two great stumbling-blocks to Jewish freedom are, first of all religion and, secondly, extreme nationalism.

When the late Field-Marshal Lord Allenby was installed as Rector of (I think) Edinburgh University, he said: "Until we eliminate nationalism from our midst and until the whole world becomes international in its outlook, we will have recurring wars." I Rennap, himself a Jew, in his book "Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Question," just published by Lawrence and Wishart, London, price 2s. 6d., deals with this question of nationalisation. He is strongly opposed to a Jewish National Home in Palestine and points out that Zionism will only bring about a small State in which the Jewish religion will be a dominant factor and that the whole political outlook of the Jews will tend to become more and more imperialistic. He quotes from Lord Melchett, a leading British Monopoly Capitalist and a leading Zionist, who, speaking in 1936, said that Palestine can become a single political entity, a self-government within the British Empire. That imperialistic alliance, Rennap points out, has been cemented by capital investment. Zionism is now strongly linked with the City of London (and Wall Street) through the medium of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and he says: "Thus amongst the pillars of the Zionist Movement there are British and American Jews who are prominent in the world of British and American finance."

He tells us that in 1936 £20,000,000 of British and £10,000,000 of American capital was invested in Palestine, and he gives a long list of some of our leading British capitalists who are interested, largely from an economic standpoint, in the formation of the Jewish State in Palestine. We have all seen, especially

since the last war, the dangers of extreme nationalism, and Rennap gives, as his solution, the absorption of the Jewish people with the people in whose countries they live. He points out that this has already been done in Russia, where anti-Semitism is made a crime, and although the Russian Government gave to the Jews certain areas in the Ukraine and the Crimea, there was no attempt to make these a State within a State, and the Jews, for the first time in the history of Russia, were allowed to travel freely, settle where they wished and feel, above all things, that they were Russian citizens.

The results have shown how wise the Soviets were in so treating, not only the Jews, but the many different nationalities which comprise Russia and in welding the whole into one united nation. The same thing happened when the Russians occupied the Baltic States. In Lithuania, whose Government was 100 per cent. anti-Jewish, anti-Semitism was promptly declared a crime. The result of this wise legislation has been shown in the present war. The German broadcast to incite the Russians against their Jewish comrades has been a miserable failure, and the large numbers of Jews who have volunteered for service in the Red Army and who are fighting desperately against the Huns in guerilla warfare, shows how wise this policy was.

In the military field the Jews occupy an honoured position. The head of the Red Air Force, Jacob Smushkevich, is a 39-year-old Jew who has been a thorn in the side of the Germans. There are at the present time over a million Jewish soldiers in the Russian Forces; but perhaps the most extraordinary fact in connection with all this was that General Lev Dovator, killed in action on the Moscow Front when leading his Cossacks against the enemy and decorated by Stalin for exceptional valour a few weeks before his death, was a Jew. It is a tremendous social advancement that the Cossacks should welcome a Jew as their leader. Before the Revolution practically all the anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia were conducted by the Cossacks.

If one reads history, the causes of anti-Semitism are not hard to find, and religion is the culprit. The Jews crucified, or it was alleged that they crucified, Christ, and the object of all devout Christians throughout the centuries has been to crucify the Jews in return. When Hitler blames the Jews for the economic chaos in Europe he is only again following the path of previous history. The Jews have always been the scapegoats—they were blamed for the spread of venereal disease in the 15th century and were killed in thousands. They have been made the scapegoats for a bad harvest, for floods, earthquakes and economic depressions. They have been herded in ghettos, deprived of civil rights and forbidden practically all professions, nearly all trades and the right to serve in the armed forces.

This drove them into usury, and as the Catholic Church, which was nominally opposed to usury amongst their followers, had to have money, they had no objection to taking it from the Jews who, in their opinion, were damned already in any case. And so the long brutal story of murder and persecution and of racial discrimination, fanned by the ignorant bigotry of the Christian Church, was directed against the Jews. The result was that they never had a chance of being absorbed by the people amongst whom they lived. The Jew retained all his old shibboleths and developed to a high extent the clan instinct. In his inmost soul he despised, although he fawned on, his oppressors, because his religion told him that he was a member of a chosen race—that God, who created all men, had chosen the Jews as a race apart and as his own favourites.

There is no doubt that this ridiculous theory gave Hitler his idea of the Germans being a pure Aryan race. Very early on the Jew realised that despite Christian claims to possess a religion superior to his own and which boasted three gods instead of one, the only god which counted was the god of money.

(To be continued)

F. A. HORNIBROOK.



## CONAN DOYLE'S EARLY RELIGIOUS DISBELIEFS—II.

CONSISTENTLY with his Deistic beliefs—remindful, too, of the attitude of Thomas Paine—is Doyle's remark that "the nearest green field is the inspired page from which you may read all that it is needful for you to know."

I give this wholly with a view to being entirely fair to Doyle.

"The Freethinker," he continues in one of his letters to Swanborough, "is placed at this disadvantage in ordinary society—that whereas it would be considered very bad taste upon his part to obtrude his unorthodox opinion, no such consideration hampers those with whom he disagrees."

"There was a time when it took a brave man to be a Christian. Now it takes a brave man not to be."

"Those whom I love best are those who have least sympathy with my struggles. They talk about having faith as if it could be done by an act of volition. They might as well tell me to have black hair instead of red."

"I might simulate it perhaps by refusing to use my reason at all in religious matters."

"But I will never be a traitor to the highest thing that God has given me."

"I will use it."

"It is more moral to use it and go wrong than to forgo it and be right."

"With all respect to you, Bertie, it is very easy to be orthodox. A man who wanted mental peace and material advancement in this world would certainly choose to be so. As Smiles says: 'A dead fish can float with the stream; but it takes a man to swim against it.'"

Asking "What could be more noble than the start and the starter of Christianity?" Doyle proceeds:—

"And then how clouded has become that first daybreak!

"Its representatives have risen from the manger to the palace, from the fishing smack to the House of Lords."

"Nor is that other old potentate in the Vatican, with his art treasures, his guards, and his cellars of wine, in a more logical position."

"They are all good men and talented men, and in the market of brains are worth perhaps as much as they get."

"But how can they bring themselves to pose as the representatives of a creed which, as they themselves expound it, is based upon humility, poverty and self-denial?"

"Not one of them who would not quote with approval the parable of the Wedding Guest. But try putting one of them out of his due precedence at the next Court reception. It happened some little time ago with a Cardinal, and England rang with his protests."

"How blind not to see how they would spring at one leap into the real first place if they would but resolutely claim the last as the special badge of their master!"

"What can we know? What are we all?"

"Poor, silly, half-brained things peering out at the infinite, with the aspirations of angels and the instincts of beasts."

"But surely all will be well with us. If not, then He who made us is evil, which is not to be thought. Surely, then, all must go well with us!"

Doyle thus quotes a doctor (Cullingworth) with whom he worked in England:—

"He declares that looking round at Nature he can see nothing but ruthlessness and brutality."

"Either the Creator is not all-powerful, or else He is not all-good," says he. "Either he can stop these atrocities and won't, in which case He is not all-good; or else He would stop them but can't, in which case He is not all-powerful."

"It was a difficult dilemma," adds Doyle in reference to himself as the person to whom these views were expressed, "for a

man who professes to stick to reason to get out of. Of course, if you plead faith, you can get out of anything."

In the course of further remarks addressed to Swanborough, Doyle says:—

"You make a mistake in assuming that those who think as I do are such a miserable minority."

"The whole essence of our thought is independence and individual judgment, so that we don't get welded into single bodies as the Churches do, and have no opportunity of testing our own strength."

"From all sides one hears that every Church complains of the absence of men in the congregations. The women predominate three to one. Is it that women are more earnest than men?"

"I think it is quite the other way."

"But the men are following their reason and the women their emotion."

"It is the women only who keep orthodoxy alive."

"No; you mustn't be too sure of that majority of yours. Taking the scientific, the medical, the professional classes, I question whether it exists at all. The clergy, busy in their own limited circles, and coming in contact only with those who agree with them, have not realised how largely the rising generation has outgrown them."

"And (with exceptions like yourself) it is not the most lax, but the best of the younger men—the larger-brained and the larger-hearted—who have shaken themselves most clear of the old theology."

"They cannot abide its want of charity, its limitations of God's favours, its claims for a special Providence, its dogmatism about what seems to be false, its conflict with what we know to be true."

"We know that man has ascended, not descended."

"So what is the value of a scheme of thought which depends upon the supposition of his fall?"

"We know that the world was not made in six days; that the sun could never be stopped since it was never moving; and that no man ever lived three days in a fish."

"So what becomes of the inspiration of a book which contains such statements?"

Reference will be made in the concluding instalment next week to a conversation with a curate, in which Doyle expresses himself regarding the Divinity of Jesus.

FRANK HILL.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

## ACID DROPS

NO one can deny to-day that Christianity is, in the mouths of many, a very accommodating kind of a religion. It is made to mean anything—which is really nothing with a verbal mask. Words, as we so often have said, reach their maximum utility only when their reference is sharply defined. But the definition of Christianity in the mouths of its defenders appears to mean anything with which this or that individual agrees. Thus, looking at a recent issue of "John Bull," we lighted on a paragraph which assured its readers that "Fewer people go to church, but more people are functioning as Christians and demanding a new order of society to replace the one which has been an unconscionable long time in dying." The conclusion is that we must all get back to Christianity if we want to create a new world.

But why get back to Christianity? And why is Christianity necessary? Attempts to create a new society are not uncommon. In the earlier part of the last century, there were many attempts to found a new society: Robert Owen had one try, and there were several attempts made in America. Some of these were frankly non-Christian, and it was Christian animosity that helped to kill several good experiments. Then in our own day we have had attempts to create a new society in Germany and Italy,



which the United Nations are trying to put an end to as speedily as possible; and we have also had a new society established in Russia, which was a little more than non-Christian, and which we have been praising very much of late. To be quite fair, it was not until Russia showed what she could do in physical warfare that some Christians here began to get almost lyrical in her praise, while a large number of Christians—perhaps the majority—believe that the less we have to do with Russia when the war is over the better for Christianity.

So why must we have a Christian society? Obviously the shaping of a new world has no necessary connection with Christianity. Why is not a new human society on a sound human basis enough? Briefly, we may reply to that pertinent inquiry that there are phases in our social life—ugly phases—that can only be perpetuated so long as we are not familiar with the nature of social development, and look upon any attempt to reshape human life as a revolt against God. Once it is admitted that the improvement of human nature lies with human beings, and with human beings alone, the outlook for an army of priests and for those anti-social influences that need checking or destroying, or even educating, is very black.

Here is another piece of word-humbug, but which has an enormous currency. A Mr. Norman Brown writes in "The Times" for January 30, after pleading for more Christianity in schools:—

"The Christian religion is founded not only on rational (blessed word that!) conceptions, but on a fact in history—the incarnation."

Now in the name of all that is rational, or reasonable, how can the incarnation of God in Christ be a *fact* in history? Or to put it in another way—for, after all, delusions are as much "facts" as a rump steak, although of a different order—how can anyone tell that a god is incarnated in a particular man? If there is a film of black oil on the surface of our glass of milk, we know that something unmilky has got into it. But unless we know what a god is like, and what a man looks like or feels like when God takes up his residence in him, how do we know God is there? Flatulence may change the contour of a man's stomach; an overdose of whisky may lead to uneven walking and a thickened speech. These kinds of "incarnations" are detectable enough. But to call the alleged incarnation of Jesus an historic *fact*—that is, an objective fact—is just plain, ordinary, damned nonsense; and we have a multitude of priests in the country who live on such nonsense.

The method of the B.B.C. in finding whether religion is true and useful, is to have a discussion between people who all believe religion is true, and carefully avoid permitting anyone to put the other side. Of course, this method is cowardly—it entails all kinds of lying and misrepresentation—but it is the B.B.C. in action. The worst of this method is that it spreads the poison in many directions. Thus, a public meeting was arranged the other day in Clapham when a Roman priest, a Methodist and an Anglo-Catholic (extreme Church of England) appeared before the audience. That is quite in accordance with B.B.C. policy; and a more cowardly or dishonest policy could hardly be found. For the real issue before the public is not which of these three variants of the same foolishness is preferable, but whether any of them is to-day worth bothering about. But by handling it according to the B.B.C., fools are strengthened in their folly, and the fact that all these forms of religion are struggling for existence is lost sight of.

The Roman Catholic papers claim that in spite of existing difficulties 500,000 people visited the grotto at Lourdes in the

course of six months. We sympathise with those who did the pilgrimage, and many must have run risks to get there. But stupidity is not a punishable offence—if it were, "who'd 'scape a whipping"—and we regret the dangers to which many must have exposed themselves—particularly those who, after all their trouble drew blanks.

But we understood that as the Lourdes Branch of the miracle show was barred to many—British citizens, for example—other miracle shops had been opened in Wales and elsewhere, and that trade was brisk. There were the usual records of cures, and we do not doubt this concerning some of the cases. Hysterical cases are very, very common and, as every doctor knows, people may be cured of a complaint they have never acquired. Many quacks have fattened on this fact, and the damnable thing is that a medical man is often only able to effect a cure by working—openly—along the lines of the patient's delusions. The Roman Church exploits some of the most pitiful weaknesses to which human nature is prone.

Since the war opened our local supporters of Fascism and Nazism have been compelled to lie low. But the disfiguring of a statue of Lenin in Finsbury comes as a timely reminder that these men and women are still with us, and as the war approaches its close we must expect them to renew their activities. It is worth remembering that we have the Roman Church, which has publicly reminded its followers that the friendship with godless Russia is for the "duration" only. And it must always bear in mind that the praise that has been lavished upon Russia is confined to its far-seeing ability in conducting the war against Germany, not for the much greater fact that in a generation a people have been lifted out of the depths of degradation under religious rule, and placed upon a road of betterment without religion. That lesson should not be lost.

A further important point to be born in mind. In no country was there circulated a greater mass of lies concerning the brutality of the Russian revolutionists, and so much mock sympathy with the Russian people who were trembling under an evil, godless Government, than were circulated in this country by a certain class. Hitherto, while the authors of these lies have been silent since Russia became our Ally, there are few who have had the decency to confess their mistaken propaganda. In the main the praise is for military Russia. When peace comes what tune will the Churches and the leaders of "big business" have to play? We can learn much from Russia, besides war, if we have the wit to recognise it and the courage to proclaim it.

"John Bull," late in the day, has joined the ranks of the discontented. In a recent criticism of the Brains Trust it scathingly attacks its utilities, and says that while no one wishes the Brains Trust to be dull and dreary, after all the function of the Trust is to furnish logical answers to reasonable questions, and rather scathingly comments on the "cackling and guffaws" to which one listens, and the "flood of buffoonery" to which the public is exposed. We hope that these protests have a good influence; we can then devote our energies to other things which the newspapers and others do not find it safe to handle.

One thing that should be taken in hand is the religious lessons—for children—that take place in the children's half-hour. The very voice of the man who gives children versions of the Bible is enough to condemn him. One seldom hears that tone without a considerable degree of humbug behind it. We should like to see a frank expression of our Russian allies on the way these things are done in the name of morality.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Farnival Street, Holborn,  
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. FINLAY.—Thanks for titles of books; will look out for them.  
E. R. GAINS.—Your cheery letters are always welcome. We are being kept very busy, and it may be that this acts as an element of health, since there is no time for bothering about it. There is an old story but a good one of an ardent Christian who, asked by an equally ardent social worker what time he reserved for his soul, replied: "I never have time to think about it." By worrying too much about health, one may easily invite its opposite.

C. F. WALTERS.—So far as our information goes, the procedure of the B.B.C. Brains Trust is as follows: First, the questions sent in are sorted out by a committee. Their job is to see that no question of importance—that is, which would require a reply that would let the cat out of the religious bag—is allowed to pass. A number of harmless questions, the answers to which would be found in any encyclopædia, are passed to the chairman of the "session," whose duty it is to see that nothing in the least likely to threaten religion or existing institutions is said. It finishes with the chairman's surprise at finding his tame wisacres know all that any decently read man ought to know.

H. HENRY.—We have under consideration reprinting, but have not definitely decided. Pleased you find the articles interesting and instructive.

For distributing "The Freethinker": W. Nelson, £10.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Gnr. A. Edwards, £2 3s.

*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.*

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## SUGAR PLUMS

WE intended to note earlier a rather striking article by that well-known writer, A. A. Milne, published in "Time and Tide," on the effect of his recent reading of Eddington's "Nature of the Physical Universe" had upon him. Naturally he finds the God of the theologians anything but an impressive figure when contrasted with what we know of Nature's workings. In fact, he hardly hides his contempt for it. He wonders why anyone should ever have presented God as "Father." How, he asks, can he be "anything" or "anybody"? And looking at the Universe he thinks that if there is a God "in this human way," then if God is to be traced through the known Universe, "He would want to talk" to Einstein and Eddington, as he had already talked to Galileo and Newton. "But I simply cannot imagine him wanting to talk with a Pope or an Archbishop of Canterbury eagerly waiting to discuss the length of a cascock, or the importance of not marrying a deceased wife's sister. . . . A consideration of the nature of the Universe does not immediately suggest that its Creator was exclusively concerned with sexual morals."

Mr. Milne thinks "it is time that the Church freed itself of its baby-clothes and realised that an Interpretation of the Universe and the Power behind it which satisfied a primitive race does not automatically fill the needs of an instructed world."

Finally, Mr. Milne speculates what would happen if half an hour was given to a one-man Brains Trust and a priest came to answer "How do you explain so-and-so? Do you really believe such and such? Why? Why?—and Why? How many clergymen could stand up to it?"

The reply is that there is not a clergyman in Britain who would or could stand up to it. Mr. Milne writes with ill-concealed contempt of the clergy, and hardly disguises his belief that the intellectual reign of the gods has come to an end. We do not know whether Mr. Milne would call himself an Atheist, but he is not far from earning a title that religious bigotry has covered with honour. The world has grown too great and too interesting to fit in with any god. It is rapidly becoming an insult to intelligence to suggest otherwise.

A smart rap on the knuckles was given to Roman Catholics in Bradford by Alderman Walter Hodgson when he put into the hands of the local press a letter which he (along with others) received after he voted against a Catholic amendment on the question of more help for Church schools. An organisation with the pompous title, "The Bradford Central Council of the Catholic Parents' and Electors' Association," sent a letter to those Councillors who voted against the Catholic amendment, "noting" the action, "regretting" it, and "putting on record their displeasure and dissatisfaction with all who voted against Mrs. Chambers' amendment." The letter was published in full, with some straight talking from Alderman Hodgson, who made it clear that he would not be bullied or cajoled by the implied threats of the Catholics. This firm stand, together with some candid editorial remarks, exposed the crafty and subtle methods of the R.C.s, to their considerable disadvantage, and no doubt will inspire other Councillors to be more courageous in future; as well as enlightening the public. A few similar acts on the part of non-Catholic public men would do much to encourage the knock-kneed administrators who tremble at the thought of the Catholic vote, and to blow away the myth that 5 or 6 per cent. of electors can unseat Councillors or M.P.s at the behest of the priesthood.

We have heard a great many curious reasons for pleading "agnosticism" as a semi-protest against Atheism, but the most curious of all is the phrase used by Lord Elton in a notice of a recent book by C. E. M. Joad in which the latter fumbles about in his usual fog. Lord Elton says that Mr. Joad comes to rest "on the positive side of Agnosticism." The passage is Mr. Joad's—not Lord Elton's—although on the principle that muddle calls to muddle, it might be fathered by either. What we are puzzled about is, what does it mean? If it means belief in a God, but one is not quite sure what he is like or what he will do, that is a position taken up by a very large section of Christians. If it means what it usually means, that one cannot decide whether there is a God or not, there is nothing positive about it. We take it that in the minds of the author and the reviewer it is a case of like calls to like. One is muddled on the side of God and the other is muddled without actually taking sides. If either or both will settle down to understand what the world of real believers has always meant by "God" and then face what we know about the origin of that belief, they would then be able to come to a definite conclusion. But that would not be the conclusion reached by either.

The disturbance of things in general, together with the taking over of buildings suitable for meetings, called a halt to the activities of the Manchester Branch N.S.S. Thanks to the loyalty of one of our old friends, Mrs. McCall, of 50, Stamford Street, Old Trafford, who has consented to meetings being held in her house every Sunday from 2-30 to 4-30 for those who are members of the branch or are interested in its work.



## SECOND-HAND BOOKS

ARRIVED at a strange town, or a long unvisited one, I usually take the earliest opportunity to wander shopwards. This, too, with the knowledge that the local attractions in the way of historical buildings and gracious views are almost as splendid as the guide-book says. Not, mind you, that I yield to any man when it comes to venting approbatory murmurs on castle wall and humpback bridge: it is merely that these are comparatively stable objectives, whereas shop goods are continuously exposed to the acquisitive instincts of the passing world, and goodness only knows what bargains some low ruffian may be picking up while one is dallying. I don't, of course, explore all the shops: as a matter of fact it has to be a largish town that contains more than half a dozen of the kind that interests me. The first is generally to be found a score or so yards beyond the last of the chromium and fancy-plaster emporiums, and can often be spotted from afar by the presence outside the window of some rickety trays labelled "4d. and 6d."

Second-hand books may monopolise a shop, they may share an uneasy partnership with new books, or they may supplement a choice collection, euphemistically described as "antiques," of the orts and baubles of generations past and gone. I prefer the first arrangement. The next is too disturbing: the more tempting among the new books are invariably the more outlandishly expensive, and oh! how hollowly rings the cherished Birrellism that all the best books are necessarily second-hand. The third is better: there may indeed be a covetable cloisonné to infringe on the true serene, but the more likely apposition of Wild Wales and a Welsh dresser puts no strain on my selective powers.

Even the "exclusive" second-hand bookshop may have its shortcomings. Too frequently the stock is higgledy-piggledy or reveals here and there the mere traces of a system gone to seed. Incidentally, I wonder whether the running of small shops will ever make an appeal to the young? Has "lack of prospects" been the barrier hitherto? A "live" and well-ordered second-hand bookshop might repay pretty handsomely. No doubt the chronic book-hunter doesn't need incentives—maybe he is even stimulated by a sweet disorder—but the casual buyer does. I represent the casual buyer; normally, when I go into a shop, I like to be able to ascertain in the shortest possible time what books are in stock on the subjects, or of the authors, that interest me.

I do admit, however, that if there is time to spare, I am prepared to scan all the visible titles of a well-shuffled stock, for I know what satisfaction there is to be had in "coming across" a long-sought-for "Letters of D. H. Lawrence" sandwiched between "Lord Oakburn's Daughters" (50th Edition, 1895) and "The Pytheley Book of Refined Cookery and Bills of Fare," by Major L—. And sometimes I like to buy a book on chance, knowing little or nothing about it: such a first fine, careless capture was Oscar Browning's "Memories of Sixty Years"; how otherwise could I have become the proud possessor of what is probably the world's most fatuous autobiography?

Books are notorious inculcators of precept. One of my most valued precepts was learnt from the actual buying of books—second-hand books. It is: Never to give as presents the books that I think the recipients might like or ought to read. I have long ceased to be amazed at the large number of old books with uncut pages; the only feature about these aged virgins that makes me take notice and look again is a fly-leaf that does not have inscribed upon it some such legend as "With best wishes to my loving niece, Christmas, 1907." And throughout the long years it has never once occurred to the nieces or their successors to look inside those carefully selected volumes. I wonder what the proportion of read books to bought books is? Disgustingly low, I'll be bound: I really must read some more of my own.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

## FREETHOUGHT PROPAGANDA

ONE of the most encouraging features which many of the new recruits to our movement show in abundance is their keen enthusiasm, and this comes out particularly in their suggestions as to the best ways and means of propagating Freethought. It is obvious that, when reading or listening to their plans, they look upon some of us older people as more or less out-of-date fogeys. They may be right, of course, and so we should, I think, examine their ideas very carefully, for after all, the young people of to-day will be in due course the veterans of to-morrow.

When I look back upon something like 40 years of Freethought, I often wonder why we have not made far and away more progress. When I first read Paine's "Age of Reason" it seemed to me so unanswerable that I could not imagine any reader ever believing in the Bible again. Yet I have met quite a number who laugh at Paine, claim that he never understood the Bible, and that any competent theologian could answer him as easily as kiss your hand. These people point out that we Freethinkers are still, 150 years after the "Age of Reason" was written, attacking the Bible and writing new books about it. If Paine dealt a death blow to the "Holy" work, why should we be doing this?

It is rather curious, too, that many of the people whom I meet in daily life—and who are outside the movement—are profound believers in the Bible. They may be quite irreligious—that is, they may never go to church or even keep a Sabbath day—but for them the Bible is a book apart. A few are not altogether unacquainted with Freethought literature, but it appears to have made very little impression. I do not mean to assert that they believe everything they find in "Holy Writ"; in fact, I know that some do disbelieve in miracles. But the Bible is the Book of God all the same.

In our propaganda we are often tempted to make no difference between "religion" and one particular brand of religion—Christianity; and this seems to me to be one of the reasons why there are two schools of attack in our ranks. For example, there is the school of thought which insists that "Bible-banging," as it is called, is out of date and merely flogging a dead horse. It suggests that our propaganda confines itself to attack, entirely or almost entirely, from the "scientific" point of view. We should call upon history, anthropology, the science of comparative religions, philosophy, sociology and even economics. It is a sheer fatuity, they contend, "to waste energy and precious paper" on such obsolete discussions as the "historicity" of Jesus. Let me say at once that I am all for these contentions if it is "religion" in the bulk that we are attacking.

Of course the origin of religion must be found in primitive man's fears and mistakes. Of course the scientific study of, say, anthropology, will shed a flood of light on the motives for, and the meanings of, certain aspects of religion—all religion including, naturally, Christianity.

But when we are dealing with a huge theological system built up, if you like, from the old and mistaken notions of the Universe, when that system has been so imposed upon the community that it is reckoned as almost completely identified with it, when nearly every detail in it has been championed by brilliant thinkers, it does seem to me that attacking religion in general terms is not quite enough. We have to descend to particulars.

An Archbishop may say when he finds that large numbers of people do not know the Lord's Prayer by heart, that they do not all go regularly to church, or keep all the saints' days as holy, or take part in the Church's activities in every way, that the English are not Christians. This may be so, but it by no means follows that England is really Atheist at heart. We must all have met dozens of people who are not churchgoers but who believe quite sincerely in God—and even in Jesus. They may agree that Jesus is not Divine, but he certainly is, for them, divine.



One of the things which puzzles me is why so many of our young and enthusiasts Freethinkers who have given up "Bible-banging" want those of us who have not given it up to stop our propaganda and, instead, go into attacking what they call "political superstitions." All around me are various societies which have this for their object, and I cannot for the life of me see why we should swell their number. Christianity may or may not be weakening, but religion is very strong and the scientific attack has never been wanted there more than now.

The most powerful propaganda force in the country, the B.B.C., with its millions of listeners, is permeated with religion—Christianity. You may get a few speakers hesitating over some of the things for which Christianity stands, but they seem quite unable to throw over religion. In fact, I have often been quite surprised at the reverent way "scientists" will talk about God, and follow this up with the most generous tributes to a Roman Catholic priest's beliefs. And as for the way Christianity is propagated, there is no need for any comment of mine. The question is constantly dealt with in these columns. But the one point we keep hammering is not our objection to the balderdash which pours out from parson and priest, but to the fact that we Freethinkers are never given a chance of replying. Until that comes our way in full measure, the less we talk about attacking "political superstitions" the better.

Of course, it may be argued, and is argued, that religious belief does very little harm and that therefore we can well leave it alone. If that is the point of view of those who want us to "lay off" religion and Christianity I can only say I do not share that view. I am no Socialist, but I still agree with that stalwart fighter, Robert Blatchford, when in his palmy and never-to-be-forgotten days he cried out—though others thought it would kill his movement—that religion was the great enemy of mankind. That was the view of an even greater man—Thomas Paine. He realised that there could never be the Rights of Man without an Age of Reason; and he smote the religion of his day with an attack that still has its use in a believing world.

I plead that if religion is the enemy, we want all the methods of attack—Bible-banging and science, whichever suits the task immediately at hand; and speaking for myself, I know no more effective onslaught on Christianity than the path blazoned out by such giants as Dupuis, Robert Taylor, John M. Robertson and a few others. To show that the central Deity of the Christian faith is a myth, a literary myth, seems to me to be the most staggering way of attacking it.

But good luck to all those who feel that other ways and means are far better! And may success crown their efforts.

H. CUTNER.

## THE IMMORTAL BARD

*That night a child might understand,*

*The De'il had business on his hand.*

ROBERT BURNS, lawful son of William Burns, in Alloway, and Agnes Brown, his spouse, was born January 25, 1759. . . (Extract from the Session Books of Ayr Parish.)

Burns startled the world with a little book of poems in 1786, which proclaimed him a true son of the muses. In his short career he poured forth song after song of emotional tenderness expressed in the most felicitous language, and made himself immortal. An enemy of the Church, many of his anti-religious songs and poems were suppressed or destroyed; the clergy often referred to him as the "immoral bard," charging him with "blasphemy and ribaldry," and causing rumours to float about to the Poet's prejudice, concerning his convivial excesses and errors of moral conduct. We are, however, not concerned with his character, but his message.

\* A true Poet—a man in whose heart resides some effluence of wisdom, some tone of the 'Eternal Melodies,' is the most precious gift that can be bestowed on a generation: his life is a rich lesson to us; and we mourn his death as that of a benefactor who loved and taught us."—Carlyle.

Another cause for prejudice against Burns was that his ancestors were Jacobites. "My father was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer who, like his ancestors, had rented lands of the noble Keiths of Marischal, and had the *honour* of sharing their fate. I do not use the word *honour* with any reference to political principles; *loyal* and *disloyal* I take to be merely relative terms in that ancient and formidable court, known in this country by the name of club law, where right is always with the strongest. . . . I mention this circumstance because it threw my father on the world at large, where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom."—Autobiography.

"My ancient but ignoble blood  
Has crept through scoundrels since the Flood."

—Autobiography.

In my infant and boyish days I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family (Betty Davidson, a relation by the mother's side), remarkable for her ignorance, credulity and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantrips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery." This cultivated the latent seeds of heresy. "This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave, brought me to my sixteenth year, a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme." . . . "I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, and where two or three were gathered together there was I among them. Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half-mad; and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, etc., used, a few years afterwards, to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me which has not ceased to this hour." . . . "With a strong appetite for sociability, as well as from native hilarity, as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriacism that made me fly from solitude." (Autobiography.)

## THE BACHELORS' CLUB AT TARBOLTON

(1780. Age 21)

"The social, friendly, honest man, whate'er he be  
'Tis he fulfils great Nature's plan, and none but he."

"Rule X.—Every man, proper for a member of this Society, must have a frank, honest, open heart, above anything dirty or mean, and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the club, and especially no mean-spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall, upon any pretence whatever, be admitted." Regulations of the Bachelors' Club: Burns was president of the club, which met once a month for debate and discussion; such questions were debated as, "Whether do we derive more happiness—from love or friendship?" "Whether is the savage man, or the peasant of a civilised country, in the most happy situation?"

Robert Burns, hard-working ploughman, a man who had little art in making money and little less in keeping it, a man of some sense, a great deal of honesty and unbounded goodwill to every creature, rational and irrational. He died an old man at 37.



A "Kilmarnock" Burns, one of the most sought for books in the world, was sold for £800 at Sotheby's on February 22, 1938. At an auction sale the same year in New York one was sold for 5,000 dollars. The Kilmarnock edition was Burns' first effort at a book of poems. He wanted to pay his passage to the West Indies in 1786, so he sent to the printer, John Wilson, of Kilmarnock, "Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect." Before publication 350 copies were subscribed for, and 612 copies were sent out to the public, but few are now in existence, thanks to religious maniacs, who were mainly responsible for their destruction.

J. HUMPHREY.

## THE ALCHEMIST

### I.

Within this loathsome den,  
Remote from haunts of men,  
I ply my secret trade;  
Nature to me alone  
One secret has made known,  
To me this truth has shown:  
That ALL MEN ARE AFRAID.

I write above my door,  
"Come in and fear no more"—  
They come, and buy my charms;  
This prince is seeking gold;  
That lover would be bold;  
Another is too old;  
And death this one alarms.

Why should a prince seek gold?  
A man fear to be old?  
Or natural death dismay?  
Fear is the hidden source  
That drives men on perforce  
To me to have recourse—  
For courage they will pay.

Fear is the source of greed  
In those who nothing need  
Except to feel secure;  
Money, they say, is power,  
A buttress and a tower;  
They seek gold every hour  
To make their power endure.

Why should a lover fail  
To make his suit prevail,  
There's many a willing maid;  
What is the something wrong  
With him who sings love's song  
So vainly, and so long?  
The lover is afraid.

This world has held men clever  
Who seek to live for ever,  
Who find old age a curse;  
Yet dead men never weep,  
Old men are near to sleep;  
The road of life is steep,  
The way to death no worse.

I ply my chemic trade  
Because men are afraid;  
They come, I make them bold:  
I bring the lover hope;  
The prince feels greater scope;  
I serve all men their dope—  
Base metals turn to gold.

### II.

Yet there is one I fear,  
A rival draweth near;  
The wily priest is he;  
He, too, createth faith,  
Makes use of a Great Wraith  
To conquer fear of death,  
To set the timid free.

I work my Transmutation,  
But Transubstantiation  
Is his much longer word;  
I Nature's rules derange,  
He bread and wine doth change;  
Our claims are passing strange,  
They are, in fact, absurd.

I say, and I repeat,  
The priest is but a cheat,  
And so, of course, am I.  
The only gold I make  
Is what from fools I take,  
And those poltroons who quake  
And fear to live or die.

We are a pretty pair  
Of cheats, I must declare,  
Although we make men brave;  
But faith, which men so prize,  
When it is based on lies  
Withers at last and dies,  
For truth alone can save.

### III.

Yet, one day, I foresee,  
The truth shall make men free,  
My Alchemy be truth;  
My Science great shall grow  
Till man shall all things know,  
And from that knowledge flow  
Gold, potency and youth.

With Science Man shall climb  
To Wisdom more sublime  
Than we now comprehend.  
When men are taught aright,  
Fear will be put to flight,  
And Science's clear light  
To darkness put an end.

All cheats shall buried be  
When Science sets men free  
From superstitious fear;  
The priest and I shall lie  
In some dark grave, but I  
See no God in the sky,  
But Science, now and here.

BAYARD SIMMONS.



## CORRESPONDENCE

## SUNDAY THEATRE OPENING

SIR,—Your welcome observations on the vital question concerning Sunday theatre opening are very much to the point. Like most progressive measures, the question is one which is being hindered and distorted by a reactionary opposition, and it is well that with your customary logic in getting to the root of a matter, you have seen fit to tear aside the veil of humbug which has so far surrounded the issue.

As one who was present at the recent Saville Theatre meeting, when the subject was debated and a vote taken of the actors and actresses present, I should perhaps point out that not all the opposition came from the religious elements assembled. The "Godfrey Tearle mentality" was, of course, well represented, and the supporters of Sunday opening were constantly interrupted during their speeches by such cries as: "Stop meddling with the Lord's Day!" But it may interest your readers to know that the causes for this very lively and well organised opposition to Sunday opening are more numerous than was at first thought, and are to be found as much in the selfish *Society* actor as in the staunch Sabbatarian. The public have frequently been informed by the privileged few in the West End theatre that they, as actors, are "servants of the public." It was, with few exceptions, just this element—they who are usually the most vocal in their protestations of "service"—who appeared, certainly from their behaviour at this meeting, the least willing to serve if the occasion happened to be a Sunday; a day when they, unlike their humbler touring brethren in the provinces, are best able to entertain their friends—and be entertained. Not so the touring actor, who is compelled to travel long distances and under very frequently appalling conditions on a Sunday—a day long before the war noted for its bad service of trains and travelling conditions—especially where theatrical bulk travel was concerned. Of course, the West End theatre is only a mere "pin prick" in the body of the theatre of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and those who experience the worst conditions would, I feel sure, favour Sunday opening, could a ballot of all members of British Equity and the V.A.F. (the actors and music-hall trade unions) throughout the country be taken.

At the meeting great emphasis was attached by the opposition to the "decadent" Continental Sunday; one actor-soldier who should have known better even went so far as to attribute the fall of France to it! It was little use to remind this party that in addition to Sunday theatres there was also a Laval, a Bonnet, a Petain and a Darlan; and when I actually challenged him with the Russian "Glory," despite the Russian Sunday, he begged the issue by departing from the meeting after hurling his newspaper at the "platform."

There was also a good deal of talk by the opposition concerning "vested interests" in the theatre, and how those same interests would benefit from Sunday opening. It was, of course, specious pleading, as not once did they attack the big brewers and cinema-owners—two of the powerful vested interests opposing Sunday opening of the theatre. There are a few sincere and, I think, quite valid objections to Sunday opening, but the numerous advantages of such a measure far outweigh the disadvantages. I will not attempt to enumerate all the obvious benefits, for your readers have been made only too well aware of them by your long-standing campaign in the pages of "The Freethinker." There is, however, one further point which should make a good many smile. It is a significant fact that the majority of those who opposed Sunday opening at the Saville Theatre meeting are of a "right wing" mentality, and who, notwithstanding that fact, accused all those supporters of the motion as being of a reactionary frame of mind.

Need I do more than add that, in addition to Dame Sybil Thorndyke, Mr. Herbert Farjeon, Mr. Michael Redgrave, Miss Beatrix Lehmann, Mr. Franklyn Dyall, Mr. Lewis Casson, Mr. J. B. Priestley and Mr. André van Gysegheem, the entire "left-wing" of the theatre, showed itself to be behind Equity in its demand for Sunday opening.—Yours, etc.,  
PETER COTES.

## A DAY OF PRAYER

SIR,—With the pitiable accounts of the massacre of Jews in Poland and the state of children in the countries over-run by the Axis, may I suggest that the Archbishop of Canterbury take steps for an immediate Day of National Prayer?—Yours, etc.,  
R. H. YELDHAM.

## OBITUARY

## ALFRED CAYFORD

We regret to announce the death of Alfred Cayford, a member of the N.S.S. and reader of "The Freethinker" for many years. In his 83rd year at the time of death, he retained his independence of mind and character to the end, and disciplined his life in strict accord with Freethought principles. The remains were cremated at Golders Green Crematorium on Monday, February 1, when, before an assembly of relatives and friends, a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary, N.S.S.

R. H. ROSETTI.

## ROBERT BERNARD HUNTER

We regret to announce the death of Robert Bernard Hunter after an operation. Thirty-five years of age, he had entered into a new intellectual world, dispensing with religion and looking to Communism for a better social and economic order. Enthusiastic in his rescue from orthodox ideas, he showed every promise of becoming a useful soldier in the army of human liberation. The remains were cremated at the Hendon Park Crematorium on Thursday, January 28, where a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary of the N.S.S. before an assembly of relatives and friends.

R. H. R.

## WANTED

"The Prophet of Nazareth," a critical inquiry into the Prophetical, Intellectual and Moral Character of Jesus Christ, by Evan Powell Meredith, F.A.S.L. (Demy 8vo., Cloth, Lettered.) "Amphilogia or Correspondence on the Teaching of Jesus," between the Bishop of Llandaff and Evan Powell Meredith. "The Diegesis," by Rev. Robert Taylor. "Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion," by Philip Beauchamp.—Box 17, c/o "The Freethinker," 2-3, Farnival Street, London, E.C.4.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

## LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 150th anniversary. Speakers: LORD SNELL (presiding), J. McCABE, S. K. RATCLIFFE, Dr. C. JOAN, and Professor G. KEETON.

## COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bensham (Settlement Hall): Sunday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—"Science and Soul."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate, 7-0.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. T. L. SMITH—"India."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. E. HARRY HASSELL—"Religion in the Schools."



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