

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A Message from God

I HAVE received a message from God. I have never, as with Professor Jessop of Hull University, met God face to face; neither have I had the exciting experience of Moses, who saw God's "back parts." But I have now had a message from God via a gentleman who lives in the vicinity of the Old Kent Road. The message consisted of a threepenny pamphlet and an explanatory letter, the whole being worth fivepence halfpenny. I thank the writer of the letter for his interest in my welfare, but I need not thank God for, as Heine said, saving people is part of his business. He must save people, otherwise heaven would be depopulated. The sender of the letter also informs me that he was once "in the state of mind" that I appear to be, and yet God made him a "new man." The alteration may have been welcomed by this gentleman's friends on the principle of "anything for a change," but I should have to know him before and after God got him to be in a position to venture an opinion. I have come across quite a number of men who claim that God "changed" them, but that made us rather sympathetic towards God. Most of his converts one would rank as liabilities rather than assets. There is also a New Testament passage that strengthens this assumption—that "joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons." It may be that the angels find the conversations of sinners more interesting than that of the righteous, as many priests in the confession box have found the secrets of lost ladies and unattached gentlemen. The stories of saved sinners tend to be "raey."

For the moment I felt rather "stuck up" to find that the "President of the immortals" had got into contact with the editor of "The Freethinker." We have boasted that "The Freethinker" did put "a girdle round the world"; and if the girdle was a slim one, it was still a girdle. Could it be possible that "The Freethinker" is read in heaven? On reflection, we dismissed this idea because we never read of books in heaven, save the one that is kept by the recording angel. One does not hear of even so harmless an institution as a "Brains Trust." The angels sing, but they never argue. They blow trumpets, but they never brandish books. So I gave up the idea that "The Freethinker" was read in heaven. And, truth to tell, while I felt, at first jump, flattered at receiving a letter from heaven, I would sooner have had a good long letter from hell, for the best of humans are there, and I would like to meet those I admire so much and be greeted by them with a "Well done."

But the feeling of pride in receiving a message from the leader of the band—if an aggregation of trumpets and harp: can be called a band—gave way to a feeling of annoyance. Our address is fairly well known, in any case a letter

addressed "Editor, 'The Freethinker,' London," would have found us. Moreover, our office is quite near a number of buildings dedicated to God, or were so situated till German bombs blew them to smithereens, as though they were of no greater consequence than coffee stalls. But there are other of God's houses still standing, and a message could have been sent through one of them. That would have been more dignified than a letter via the Old Kent Road. I know there is only one God in heaven, but *per contra* there is only one "Freethinker" in Britain. Each of us have our status to consider and our pride to indulge. Gods and editors should appreciate each other; neither are really immortal, even though some gods act as though they are indestructible and editors put on the mask of infallibility. Both are quickly forgotten, but while they live a proper etiquette should be observed. We feel rather hurt at the clandestine way of sending a letter.

We agree also that, from the standpoint of cold common sense, it is time that God paid some attention to "The Freethinker." In the course of its existence it has robbed the deity of many of his worshippers, but, so far as we can find, God has never robbed "The Freethinker" of a worthwhile converted reader. Even those who cease to read never forget what they have learned about the origin and the nature of gods. In sober truth, a man cannot—minus obvious decay—quite forget what he has once mastered. A man who has once used a tool may, after many years of disuse, lose something of his fineness of touch, but between his rehandling of that tool and the way in which a novice handles it there is an unmistakable difference. The approach and the result will both be different. "Forgetting God" is not like forgetting where one has left his pipe, or a book or the number of a house. A man's nose once pulled remains pulled for ever. One cannot unpull it. Heine came near the truth when he wrote:—

"Whatever betide, the world may turn  
In the old primeval way,  
And, unchanging and fixed,  
Like nature itself,  
The ass will endure for aye."

Yes, the ass and the wise man may persist in their relative strengths, but it will be on a higher or lower level. The fool may step into the shoes of the philosopher, but he will not wear them as did the original owner. The higher level will be there, and on that level the gods will have neither dignity nor power. Atheism is a one-way road; a great many may never tread it, but once the first steps on that road are taken there is no return. No man can completely unlearn a lesson that has once been mastered.

### The Fate of the Gods

Everyone will agree that if God is to persist he must be discovered doing something. Previous generations

thought they had found something. He moulded the earth in the hollow of his hands, he cast forth the lightning as a man throws a spear, he sent forth plagues and controlled the weather, he gave victory in battle, and answered the prayer of the faithful. Men may have feared God, but they felt sure of his existence. None of those certainties remain. In his service he once had at least some men of high intellect—as high as the time produced. What does he command now, who can he count as his devoted, unshaken followers? In the existing situation it would not be a bad stroke of policy to convert the editor of "The Freethinker." Not, we hasten to say, because of his individual merits or ability, but merely because of the advertising value of the catch. His conversion might be due to a softening of the brain, or a rascally bid for fame; but he would still count as something to be advertised. Consider the advertising of C. S. Lewis who, solely on his own confession, was an Atheist until he had reached the maturity of a dozen years, discovered that there must be a god somewhere or the other, and now writes of the mysteries of God with far more than the confidence with which Newton set forth the theory of terrestrial gravitation; or a Joad getting a load of Press notices, and counted a capture by God because he decides, in his peculiarly muddled way, that there must be a god somewhere, although where he exists, why he exists, and what the devil he does he has never been able to discover. Other men, of a higher stamp, such as Professor Eddington and Professor Jeans, seem content if they can reduce god to a mathematical formula. But it was not mathematical formulae on which the Christian religion was built. It was upon what was considered to be concrete facts—upon a woman bearing a child without the co-operation of a male, of the raising of a crucified god from the grave and his observed ascent to heaven. The Christian Church developed and depended upon multitudes of miracles, and for those who really believe miracles still occur. Miracles never arise unexpectedly.

For those who believe, that is the crucial fact in all religion. You must believe first and you will find proof in support of it later. That is the way all gods have been created. They are never the product of a theorem. Belief comes first, the attempt at justification comes later, when common sense asks for an explanation of origin. Jesus promised salvation to "him who believeth." If belief had waited on understanding, the Christian religion would have died in its cradle.

That master of satire, Heinrich Heine, said that even in his day

"The ancient Jehovah was preparing himself for death. We have known him so well from his cradle upwards, in Egypt, where he was brought up among sacred calves, crocodiles, holy onions, ibises and cats. We have seen him as he bid adieu to these playmates of his childhood and obelisks and sphinxes, and became a small god-king in Palestine to a poor pastoral people, and dwelt in his temple palace. We saw him later when he came into contact with the Assyrian-Babylonian civilisation, and laid aside all his too human passions, and no longer belched wrath and vengeance, at least no longer thundered for every trumpery trash of sin. We saw him emigrate to Rome, the capital where he renounced all national prejudices

and proclaimed the heavenly equality of all races, and with such fair phrases formed an opposition to the ancient Jupiter, and intrigued so long that he rose to power, and from the Capitol governed the state and the world, *urbem et orbem*. We saw how he spiritualised himself more and more, how he sweetly wailed when he became a loving father, a universal friend of humanity, a benefactor of the human race, a philanthropist. It all availed him naught.

"Hear ye, the bell rings. Kneel down: they bring the sacrament to a dying God."

This was written nearly a century ago, and that God is still dying, slowly, for gods do not die as easily as do kings; they are not disposed of easily, yet they do die, poor, attenuated things who eventually fade into nothingness because of the absence of the incense and praise upon which alone they can live. History has seen the Christian god beginning as the deity of an obscure Semitic tribe, passing by degrees to almost world domination, delivering his messages through thunder and lightning, earthquakes and world disasters, and then suffering a gradual retreat before the attacks of an enemy who will make no terms but demands unconditional surrender, and finally we find him relying upon the semi-insane ravings of an Old Kent Road devotee. Poor, poor God! To have meant so much, and to have come to so little!

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### MR. BUTLER'S HEADACHE

ALTHOUGH the White Paper on Education has been favourably received by the Anglicans, who are prepared to accept a measure of control in return for a financially free platform for denominational dope, trouble is brewing in the Catholic camp, where the religious aspects of the White Paper are not at all popular.

Each attitude is understandable, of course. The Churches generally are having a very lean time. Therefore, it is natural that the Protestant Church, in a nominally Protestant country, should be willing to concede just a little of its privilege in return for full schools maintenance. The chief concession would be in the acceptance of the agreed syllabus for religious instruction, with denominational instruction twice a week for children whose parents desire it. The Anglicans probably hope that this will prove to be better than losing their foothold in the schools completely, which might easily be the outcome of a "show down" on the question.

But the Catholic hierarchy is wiser than the Anglican, in one respect at least. They realise, I think, that danger lies in those words, "for children whose parents desire it." Although Catholic leaders love to prate about "the rights of parents," they are well aware that in these days parents, on the whole, just don't care two Hail Marys about religious instruction, and that if such instruction has to be "applied for," there will be precious little applying. These remarks include Catholic parents as well as others. I repeat, plainly and emphatically, that Catholic parents are almost as unenthusiastic as others on the question of religious instruction when it requires the exercise of personal initiative. The constant squeals of the Catholic press about lack of interest in "our Catholic schools" shows this plainly enough.

So the Catholic leaders, conscious that our invertebrate politicians are scared stiff of the old phrase, "Catholic vote," are sticking out for "full parental rights" on behalf of—whom? Certainly not on behalf of parents who get played hell with every week for their apathy. Certainly not on behalf of parents who

have to be ticked off from the pulpit and given penance by the priest because they fail to attend meetings concerning "our Catholic schools." But rather on behalf of dear old Mother Church, who trembles in fear of the people's trend away from religion, yet roars like a lion at the palpitating politicians who will sell the last shreds of democracy for the promise of a few undemocratic votes.

Thus the present position. The Anglican leaders smile good-naturedly out of their dog collars and promise to be good lads and help Mr. Butler all they can; but the Catholics square their celibate shoulders, shout themselves hoarse about parents' rights (the biggest joke of all) and threaten Mr. Butler with a violent headache.

Poor Mr. Butler! What a state he must have been in these past few months, preparing his educational Munich. Mr. Chamberlain appeased for peace, and gave us war; Mr. Butler seems to have appeased for Christ, and let loose the devil. What a commentary that, after years of obstruction of education because of a dual system, the White Paper proposes to remedy the trouble by means of a triple system. Truly do our leaders grasp the nettle—only to feel the sting too late!

The pre-White Paper smiles and complimentary platitudes, directed Butlerwards, have now turned into angry threats and dark denunciations. Mother Church thrusts out her wicked sting, and the big guns are paraded for all to see, and to hear their comments—Archbishop Williams, Bishop Marshall, Commander Bower, Alfred Denville, E. L. Fleming, K.C., Sir Patrick Hannon, R. R. Stokes, Lord Russell of Killowen, and so on. See what talent we have got. Just look at who is on our side!

Lord Russell of Killowen, in the Lords, advances that puerile argument that Catholics have had to suffer "the injustice" of having to support board schools through the rates, and also their own Catholic schools. Which reminds me that for many years motorists have had to suffer the injustice of having to support public transport service through the rates and also pay for their own private motor-cars. We must in future (by the same token) give motorists a 100 per cent. grant for their cars, purchase as well as maintenance, so that they can travel in their own cars, in their own atmosphere, with their own drivers, but at public cost. What's sauce for the religious goose should be sauce for the secular gander.

But the impudent game goes on. The House of Commons is lobbied by Catholic journalists on the eve of the Debate—on the eve of the Debate, mark you, not after it. The idea? Oh, of course, just to get the Members' views; not to let them know in advance that we are watching them carefully and publicising their views. Not a bit. Mother Church never threatens M.P.s. That would be degrading. She just quietly intimidates them. Not that one can ever intimidate an M.P. It wouldn't be British to be intimidated. These stout fellows fear neither threat nor innuendo, and they listen to the Debate determined to do justice in the name of democracy. Naturally. But you can't really blame them, can you, if they just think a thought or two about the voters' list at the next election? After all, a man must be a man first and a democrat afterwards. Jobs may be hard to get after the war, and these Catholic fellows can be so persistent—damn 'em!

And it doesn't seem to give much comfort to let an M.P. know that the whole of the Catholics bunched together have only 5 per cent. of the total votes of the country. You see, they are not equally distributed, and for all he knows there might be just enough in his division to kick him in the pants and deprive him of his seat, and his £600 a year, and all that goes with it. M.P.s can't be too careful, even with those damned Catholics, can they? I mean to say, wars don't last for ever, and now that Musso has done a bunk—well, as I say, you can't be too careful.

Or can you? Perhaps you can. Perhaps one day—maybe at the next election, even—the 90 per cent. of the people who don't

care tuppence about religion will have something to say for their side of the case. Perhaps they will say, in a voice that will make the Catholic shrieking sound like a tin whistle in a busy railway station, that for too long they have been mulct of their rates and taxes to pay for a religion in which they no longer believe. Perhaps they will say that having fought for democracy they are going to have a bit of it for a change. Perhaps, having thought about things during the dark days of the war, they will finally awaken to the fact that, if their children are going to have a really new world, they need none of the old division of denominationalism, no more Christian cant, but a scientific humanism and a form of education that will secure for them at least a growing measure of happiness and freedom, together with a new outlook which will put Christian "pie in the sky" into the mythical and reactionary classification to which it belongs.

When that day dawns, then will there be a real need for every M.P. to fear the vote—not the vote of the Vatican minority whose bark is fearfully worse than its bite, but the vote of an angry majority, tired of being governed by gods and Churches, and their political puppets.

It might help Mr. Butler's headache to let him know that that day may be sooner than he thinks! F. J. CORINA.

## FACTS AND FICTIONS CONCERNING THE MONASTERIES

FROUDE'S account of monastic corruption on the eve of the Reformation incensed Roman apologists, and the historian was accused of wholesale mendacity. Yet, whatever bias he may have exhibited in the volumes of his "History" which cover the reign of Henry VIII., he was far more trustworthy than his Catholic traducers or present-day monastic apologists.

Among other Romanist writers, Cardinal Gasquet and Mgr. Benson have been indicted by Dr. Coulton, either as deliberate or unconscious perverters of the truth. When in 1905 he exposed the glaring misstatements of the most prominent Catholic controversialists, Coulton offered to publish any of their rejoinders at his own cost, but one and all declined. "I have indeed," observes the Doctor, in his "Medieval Studies" (First Series, Simpkin Marshall, 1915, p. 54), "received uncomplimentary postcards from two of the gentlemen named; and a third person writing from Gibraltar and omitting to pay the postage, has sent an anonymous letter beginning, 'Who the devil are you?' . . . In addition to this, Mgr. Vaughan and Canon Courtenay have attacked me in the columns of the Romanist "Tablet," but with gross misstatements that I had no difficulty in exposing. Father Gerard again attacked me semi-officially in the same paper, showing again an ignorance of German and a readiness to make any assertion which suited his momentarily controversial purpose beyond what I had before suspected in him." Still, while they manipulate their evidence so as to buttress the faith, they continue to be esteemed as good Catholics.

Although acclaimed as a great historian by the "Church Times" and other publications, Cardinal Gasquet's glosses, omissions and shameless inaccuracies were pilloried by Coulton's unsparing pen. Indeed, for the uncritical acceptance of Gasquet's assertions, the frequent absence of first-hand research, even among otherwise reliable writers, seems mainly responsible. Significantly enough, the "Church Times," true to its Romanist tendencies, published a series of unsigned articles entitled "The English Monasteries." The anonymous writer paraded his alleged intimacy with little known medieval documents, and when his essays appeared in volume form he persistently refused permission to his publisher to disclose his identity. Also, that monument of mendacity, the Catholic Truth Society, was permitted to reprint a chapter of the hidden author's work while

extolling its writer as "an ornament of the Anglican Church and of the Society of Antiquaries." But the name of this elusive divine was not divulged, much as he resembled Gasquet and his adherents in his steady avoidance of definite documentary proof of his assertions. Moreover, when Coulton had corrected a glaring falsehood in the "Church Times," the editor suppressed a second exposure. As Coulton pertinently notes: "I have heard this policy of suppression deliberately defended by counter-accusations against other religious papers: if it is indeed true that religion has so baneful an effect on journalism, this of itself would go far to explain that decay of clerical prestige which the 'Church Times' so frequently bemoans."

The general purity of monastic life depicted in Gasquet's "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries" became the inspiration of Mgr. Benson's idyllic romance "The King's Achievement." This novel was hailed by Press reviewers as a serious contribution to historical fiction, although its author had merely reinforced Gasquet's misconceptions. Coulton justly observes that Benson transferred to his novel the cultured and refined society of his own Anglican youth to the relatively uncouth community of early Tudor times. The Paston Letters of the period, Thomas More and other contemporaries, had they been consulted, would have revealed the absurdity of his contentions.

Clear proofs of monastic decay are of ancient date, although it cannot be gainsaid that the dissolution of the religious houses by Thomas Cromwell was conducted with ruthless severity. Yet the drastic reform or abolition of the monasteries had long been demanded by pious Catholics and Henry himself died in the faith. Benson seems unaware that Piers Plowman, in 1370, lamented the monastic orders' decline and forecasted their coming dissolution. In 1450, the eminent cleric Gascoigne strongly urged their suppression, while Gower more severely censured monkish delinquencies than Wycliffe himself. "No more glaringly false historical statement," declares Coulton, "has ever been made than the assertion that the evil repute of the monks dates from Henry VIII.'s time." Complaints were long previously general concerning the monks' indolence, waste and wickedness, and only recent apologists have sought to shield them. "That paradox," continues Coulton, "has been reserved for our own days, now that 300 years of clerical decency have taught even Protestants to stagger at the sordid facts of the Middle Ages and to admit apologetic arguments that no medieval theologian ever dreamed of pleading."

Yet, Benson apparently imagined that the destruction of the religious retreats began under Henry VIII., despite the plain evidence to the contrary. He cites the Cluniac and Sussex houses as models of perfection, but their surviving records contradict him. An outstanding Cluniac settlement, the Priory of Lewes' own records from 1259 to 1317, reveal fraud and corruption, while other Cluniac documents disclose similar scandals. In the much vaunted 13th century (1280), the episcopal visitors report that the houses "are much decayed both spiritually and financially." Debts increased while properties decayed and, during a disputed election, Lewes Priory was so plundered that an appeal was made "to all its sister houses in England to make good the deficit."

The many instances of fraud, maladministration, misappropriation of money, extortion and other offences committed by abbots, prioresses, brethren and sisters, given by Coulton, make painful reading. Of the 22 settlements of monks and nuns that existed in Sussex, Coulton summarises the details of twelve. Maiming, forgery and even murder were among their crimes and, despite all protests, these seem to have worsened in Tudor times. With monastic morality Coulton declines to deal. But he conjectures with what amazement respectable people in Henry's reign would have regarded the possibility that "four centuries hence, plausible Romanist historians, backed up by romantic and enthusiastic converts, would spread abroad the belief that the monasteries had been, on the whole, seminaries of virtue and

their dissolution an act of unredeemed iniquity? For myself, I feel constrained to apologise to the monks and nuns now among us for even the momentary use of their name in connection with facts which have been proved to the hilt against their medieval predecessors."

T. F. PALMER.

## JUSTIN MARTYR'S "DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO"

### I.

ONE of the difficulties of dealing with such an academic subject as the origins of Christianity is that, more or less rare and out-of-the-way books are quoted which the average reader cannot get hold of, or does not want to be bothered reading. He is obliged to take on trust any quotation from them, and is often rather surprised when that quotation is either challenged, or the interpretation given to it strenuously denied.

Anyone who has studied the books on both sides of the problem must admit that time is incredibly wasted on such points, the reader often following the writer with whom he sympathises rather than because he has taken the trouble to look up the whole matter for himself.

A case in point is my recent controversy with Mr. A. Robertson on Justin's "Dialogue with Trypho." It would interest me very much to know what proportion of readers took the trouble to look up this work for themselves and decide one way or the other irrespective of the merits of the two disputants. The problem was: when Trypho used the word Christ was he referring to *any* Messiah, or was he referring to the Messiah or the Christ Justin believed in?

When this question came up some years ago I decided to look into it and read the dialogue for myself, and not take any quotation at second hand. I did so, and I can assure the reader here that I do not take back anything whatever I have said in quoting Justin as a witness for the undoubted fact that some Jews of the second century were quite convinced that the whole story of Jesus was a fiction (or myth) pure and simple.

As far as we can trust the authenticity of the records—and I am not concerned at the moment in going out of my way to dispute them—Justin was born at Neapolis in Samaria at the close of the first century of a (possibly) Greek father. He describes in the opening sections of his dialogue with Trypho how he was educated in Grecian philosophy, and how, meeting a venerable old man one day, and having a long discourse with him which he faithfully reports, he was converted to Christianity, coming to regard Jesus Christ as his Saviour.

Justin repeats all this to Trypho, whom he meets in "a company of gentlemen," all of whom (I suppose) were Jews, and who accosts him "with the utmost degree of civility." And after thus detailing his conversion—"I found this to be the only safe, safe and valuable philosophy"—Justin turned to Trypho and his companions and earnestly begged them to do likewise—"I heartily wish that you all thought as I do, and were not averse to the doctrine of our Saviour." And he added:—

"Wherefore if you have any regard for yourself, if you desire salvation, and trust in God, an opportunity is now offered you, if you are not unwilling to embrace it, of knowing the Christ of God, and by putting on baptism, of obtaining happiness."

Now here follows a passage which has the true authentic ring. Whether this dialogue took place exactly as recorded, it is impossible for me to say, but it is—as far as I can see in the translation—well written, and seems to be a valuable record of Justin's experience. It may not have taken place altogether as written, but that something like it did take place, I am convinced.

The passage which follows the above extract is, "At these words, dear sir, Trypho's companions burst out into a laugh"—

just as so many Jews have always done when accosted by a Christian evangelist, and just as they do even at this day. Most Jews laugh at naive attempts at conversion, because the story of their particular God having a "son" is just *unthinkable*, apart altogether from any idea of what Christians would call a fact in history. God, Jehovah, Elohim—call him what you like—simply could *not* have a son, and this accounts for the great difficulty the Christian Church has always had with the obstinate Jew.

Trypho says Justin also smiled, and most amiably declared his admiration for Justin's "inclination for knowledge of divine things." But, "It would have been better for you," adds Trypho, "still to have followed Plato, or some other of the philosophers . . . than to be deceived with vain words, and to follow a set of worthless fellows. . . . But now you have forsaken God and put your trust in a man, what salvation can you expect? . . . But Christ if he is come, and is anywhere, is unknown, nor doth he know himself, nor can he be endowed with any power, till Elias come and anoint him, and make him manifest to all men. But you having got an idle story by the end, do form to yourselves an imaginary Christ, and for his sake you foolishly and inconsiderately rush headlong into dangers, and so forfeit all the pleasures of this life."

It seems to me, however this passage is rendered by different translators, the meaning is as plain as Justin could make it. He wanted to put an extreme case in Trypho's mouth; possibly Trypho said all this; possibly more than one Jew twitted him much in the same way. Justin was not arguing with 20th century unbelievers with the whole might of centuries of heretical scholarship behind them. He gives us a picture of a Jew who flatly denied the whole story of Jesus Christ as an "idle story" and ridiculed Justin for following it and being deceived by "vain words," and "a set of worthless fellows." Of course he said, or made Justin put the words in his mouth, about putting "your trust in a man." How else could Justin have framed Trypho's objection? I have said scores of times myself in discussion with Christians, "Of course I don't believe in your man Jesus: I don't believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. In fact, I don't believe Christ ever lived." It is absurd to deduce from this that, while denying that Jesus was the Messiah, I acknowledged that he lived as a man. I deny in these remarks the whole caboodle. So did Trypho, if words have any sense at all. Justin wanted the extreme case to be put so that he could overwhelm it with his arguments. He claimed that the rabbis did not understand their own scriptures—an objection used by Christians ever since and laughed at by Jews—and that Trypho spoke by "guess" whatever came into his mind. And he proceeded to "demolish" Trypho's objections much in the same way as missionaries to the Jews have done and are still doing. In fact, the way he does it or tries to do it is highly entertaining, and can be read with interest and profit even in our own day.

H. CUTNER.

## RELIGION AND FREE SPEECH

ONE of the most amazing contrasts in this world of ours is the contradistinction between Free Speech and Religion, with the shining star of Truth looking on asking where come I in the picture?

Members of the fighting Services have, by reason of the absence of the immediate fear of want, time for reflection they have not possessed probably for the previous twenty years, and what is the culmination of their reflections? If we may try to epitomise their thoughts in concrete form we may make deductions as follow:—

Compulsory religion and the unflinching belief in the words published by the Paternoster Publishing Company, London

(copyrighted), in progressive alterations and additions to meet the times. If your thoughts should rise to the heavens, which, by the way, are not beautiful except by the presence of the sun, you are soon brought to earth by a prospective fine of £1 for non-attendance at church in total defiance of the common wish of the multitudes not to attend; it is quite possible for 25 out of 600 to turn up without this salutary warning of pecuniary loss, and we should remember the fine lady members of our fighting Forces are none the less intelligent than the men and even possess greater intelligence in this vital matter than some men whose intelligence should be of a higher order.

Free speech, the one object of this war, cannot be so with the existence of obsolete laws preventing free speech applied to observations on religious practices, and therefore these ancient and unworthy associations must go; but they are slow in disappearing. We are told the law is slow, but why should the law be slow? You see, mechanisation cannot be applied to law, hence you will escape the cavalcade of mechanisation if you place your son in the legal profession.

Religion belies free speech; as we see in Spain, the first act of the re-arrival of Italian religionists in Spain was a move for ignorance. Libraries set up by the previous government were soon destroyed and ancient medievalism set in once more for the masses, with the exception of specialised courses for those necessary to exploit the necessary minerals, etc.

Hitler also was fairly good at the destruction of books (free speech)—paper-hanging is now a lost art—and we are actually fighting for the replacement of those books. Through Italian influence Judge Rutherford's books have been destroyed by law in Australia; whatever the "rubbish" attributed to them by the Australian representative of that Church, the fact remains that the "rubbish" had become a world's best seller and covered every nation on earth. Of course, under free speech, the late Judge Rutherford should have his say, and if the "rubbish," as such was rubbish, it would have died a natural death and automatically disappeared from the country.

Now, if "The Freethinker" had had the circulation of "Consolation"? What then? "The Freethinker" is published without advertisements; so was "Consolation," but millions upon millions of "Consolations" were contributed for by individuals in every country of the world and was printed in every modern language. Free speech means the right of reasonable criticism, and this right is maintained by Russia towards religion of every kind in the world, so that he who reads "may learn."

Learning never hurt any man or woman. "AUSSIE,"  
Australia.

## ACID DROPS

THE confusion that reigns in a good many people's minds as to the meaning of the Immaculate Conception—most appear to believe it is the same thing as the Virgin Birth—is gently exposed by the priestly adviser of the "Universe," who is obliged to admit that even Catholics are quite hazy on the question. Here is his exposition:—

"The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception means that the soul of Our Lady was free from original sin and full of sanctifying grace from the first moment of her existence. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth, on the other hand, means that Our Lord was conceived by Our Lady without the intervention of a human father."

That makes the matter quite clear, but we may note that Mary did not test the patience of Joseph with any more children of heavenly origin. They appeared in the usual way.

Although the "Ethiopian Church" is quite Christian and has always been advertised as such, the "Church Times" seems very reluctant to admit it to the "Mother" Church. "If steps

are to be taken," says an editorial, "to unite them to the visible Church, before all things, as the Prayer Book says, it is necessary that they hold the Catholic Faith." But what if the Faith of the Ethiopian Church approximates more nearly to the Faith of the original Apostles? This may well be. The religious forms practised in Abyssinia, with its crude and credulous belief in all things holy, has been very little diluted with Western philosophy, and in all probability gives us the best possible idea what the Christianity of the Golden Ages was like. A revival of real, original Christianity would close the Churches in all civilised centres.

At a recent public meeting of Roman Catholics at St. Joseph's Parish Hall, one of the reasons for opposing the Government proposals with regard to education is that the Government *might* demand that their schools should be kept up to whatever standard the Government might impose. Being interpreted, this implies that the Roman Catholic schools are not of, and their owners do not wish their schools to reach, the required standard of efficiency. There is nothing new in this. The main purpose of the Church is to turn out more and more Catholics. Whether they are well educated socially is quite another matter.

The Dolgelly Savings Committee has banished a poster with the caption "Savings are like best books" and the picture of a number of books, among which is the Bible. The reason given is that the Bible should not be used in any propaganda where works of fiction are exhibited. We do not wonder at the clergy insisting that if religion is not pumped into children before they are old enough to resist they will grow up unbelievers. In a fair competition the number of people who would choose the Bible in preference to a good book of avowed fiction would be very few. Or perhaps the committee discerned sarcasm in the association of the Bible with fiction.

We are indebted to a religious journal for the information that at Salisbury Races on August 7 a horse ran named "Church Times." It didn't even get a place, and all who backed it lost their money. We leave it to experts in "occult" matters to explain the situation.

The "Church Times"—the paper, not the horse—refers to the story of The Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the plagues of Egypt as "old gags." Ye gods! The meaning of "gag" is given by a dictionary as "deceive," "hoax," "impose upon." Less than a century ago a bishop of the English Church was placed upon trial for saying this much of parts of the Bible. Now a Christian newspaper does the same thing as a matter of course. But it still believes in the miraculous birth of Jesus, and will go full force in favour of the "gag" of a national day of prayer.

"The comparative failure of modern elementary education is in no respects more glaringly displayed than in the general gullibility of the public." This is from editorial notes in the "Church Times" for August 13. And it is glaringly false. Modern elementary education, of a kind worth noting, in this country goes back only to 1870. Prior to that education was practically under the control of the Christian Churches. It was taken out of their hands—partially—because of the terrible failure of the religious bodies. Since then it has expanded by leaps and bounds. The faults of modern elementary education is that it has been *too* successful. But to be successful teachers were compelled, consciously or unconsciously, to treat religion as a comparatively unimportant subject. Therein lies the crime of modern education. It did not successfully breed customers for the Churches.

Rev. Dr. Kelly (R.C.) says the religion of the "White Paper" teaches "a hotch-potch agreed upon between the Church of England, the Free Churches, the teachers and a local committee," and his Church will have none of it. We do not find fault with the descriptive outburst of this Catholic priest, but we do not think the "hotch-potch," etc., of the Protestant Churches can equal the teaching of such deliberate fraud to children as the

"Fatima" miracle. For sheer deliberate lying, that beats every-thing we have met for some time.

A correspondent of the "Universe" suggests that one way of preventing "mixed marriages" is for Catholics to invite young people to a home "radiating with the fun of Catholic life." Yes, we could quite imagine many young people getting all the satisfaction from Catholic yarns that they might get from the "Arabian Nights." The difference would be that a good translation of the "Arabian Nights" reads better than the stodgy stories about the saints.

The same journal says that "Parents all over the country are joining new organisations to defend the schools." It is difficult for most Christian leaders to talk without at least suggesting a lie, but it seems almost impossible for Roman Catholic leaders to do so. These new organisations are really the duplication of one. First they appear as members of the Church, then as members of a Roman Catholic body, then as Trade Unionists, then as parents, and so on, and so on. "The great lying Church" continues to hold its own and smiles at the amateurish attempts at lying made by politicians, quack medicine vendors and the leaders of non-Roman religious bodies.

Professor Jessop would like to remove what he calls "the poison of Secularism," which has so widely affected the soldiers. And he thinks the best way would be for the padres to put religion on one side and talk to the men about matters in which they really are interested. Join with them "as one good fellow to another," etc. That is, don't say anything about religion at all—at least not until their confidence has been won. In other words, remember the confidence trick. Take them for mugs, get their confidence, and when you have got that, parade them as converts to Christ.

We have seen the average British soldier pictured as a good-natured, beer-loving character, and, being a democracy, we delight in showing the soldier—as in the B.B.C. performances—as simply unable to string together decently a dozen words of his mother tongue, but he has not been presented as Professor Jessop presents him, as a fool ready to be "sucked in" by a padre's religion. The padre may have given him good advice, such as he might get from one of his pals—who does *not* afterwards advertise it. But it will take more than a regiment of clergymen to reconvert the large number of Freethinkers in the Army. They are growing all the time.

The Rev. Henry Townsend writes in the "Baptist Times" that the Free Churches will not consent to any Government grant to Church schools unless these schools are transferred to the local educational authority. That, of course, would mean the breaking up of the dual system, and that is not likely to be brought about by the present Government. The Churches want power, cash and independence. And the Government seems to have promised them a good measure of each.

Besides, who can say how the "Free" Churches will act? In the mass the Nonconformists are as ready to avail themselves of State funds and State support as any political body. They accept State patronage whenever it can be obtained, they are fanatically ready to support sabbatarian laws maintained by the State, they largely support the blasphemy laws, and in very many other ways they show that where real intellectual liberty is concerned their principles are really *Christian* ones. Nor must it be forgotten that the Nonconformist Churches were as active as the Conservative Party to foster hatred against Russia, and so pave the way for the success of Hitlerism.

The Roman Catholic Church is going in for another "gag" on a wider scale. It contemplates a "world-wide crusade of public prayer." Why not? In fact, it seems a little more sensible than a more national day of prayer. Even God may get a little "fed-up" if he has to listen to prayers for peace from each nation separately. If he can listen to the whole lot at one sitting, so to speak, he should be in a more placid state of mind, and more inclined to do something.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

**JACK BARTON.**—Of course, the attitude of sailors towards religion has not altered in the direction of religious belief. Your twenty years' experience of the Navy still holds good. What has happened is that the lies of the Churches concerning the hold religion has on sailors are growing stronger, as their position gets weaker.

**S. R. GAINES (Boston, U.S.A.)**—Letter received and read with great interest. Pleased to know that you are well, and to have your high opinion of "The Freethinker." We do our best.

**E. F. T.**—Of course, the Churches would not struggle so hard to call public attention to themselves if the public took notice without so much advertising. All the technique of the cheapest form of advertising is being brought into play.

**TAB CAN.**—Obliged for cuttings. Always useful, even when not immediately used.

**F. MCKAY.**—We do not recall the letter, but it probably was crowded out. We have so little space and so much to print. One day we shall be back to our normal size. But we do appreciate very much the quiet but valuable work you and many like you are doing for our great cause. Shall always be pleased to hear from you and your friend.

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

*When the services of the National Secular Society in 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

**PROVERBIALY,** lies are hard to kill, and when the lie is one that helps along Christianity, it appears to acquire immortality. The death-bed convert from Atheism to Christianity crops up every now and again, and the evangelistic propagandist who tells yarns of how some Atheists owe their Atheism to the behaviour of certain Christians who never develop enough intelligence to merit being sent to hell, and so has deprived himself of meeting some of the finest men and women the race has produced, is still very common.

Here, for example, is a writer in the "Baptist Times" who records his memories of a well-known preacher, Rev. John Turland Brown. He says that Bradlaugh was addressing an open-air meeting in Northampton. At the end of the meeting the Rev. J. T. Brown said to Bradlaugh "What a great preacher the Church of Jesus Christ has missed in you." And Bradlaugh replied, "And I might have been such if in my young days I had had a minister like you." This is a very ancient lie, and its obvious intention was to explain Bradlaugh's Atheism as due to meeting a very unsatisfactory kind of Christian minister. If Bradlaugh could have been so affected by any preacher, he would never have developed into an Atheist at all. It is, of course, one of the mountain of lies that Christianity has accumulated in the course of its history.

### A THREAT TO FREEDOM OF PUBLICATION

WE have received some serious news from the New York "Truthseeker," the oldest Freethinking journal in the world. We are informed that Roman Catholics, taking advantage of war-time conditions, have manoeuvred to the end of preventing attacks on Roman Catholicism going through the post and, further, to prevent the importation of British books of a Freethinking character. Among these we learn that our "Bible Handbook," which has been freely circulated in the United States for over fifty years, together with some anti-Catholic books by Mr. Joseph McCabe, have been seized by Federal officials.

The "Truthseeker" has very properly decided to carry the matter into the courts and, after taking legal advice, is very sanguine of the result. But legal costs are great everywhere, and it is anticipated that the costs will reach at least \$2,500. The "Truthseeker" has sent us an appeal for monetary help, and we feel sure that all "Freethinker" readers will rise to the occasion. I have, therefore, pledged myself, which means ultimately "Freethinker" readers, to raise in English money the sum of at least £100. If it is not possible to send money until the end of the war, the promise that this responsibility will be honoured as early as possible will be enough.

Meanwhile, we ask all not to send us money until they hear further. If things turn out well the threat of legal action may be enough, and I do not want the task of writing a number of letters returning subscriptions. Promises may be sent, if anyone wishes to do so. For the moment we feel that this promise of help will be sufficient. We must show the world that Freethought is wide enough to take notice wherever liberty of speech and publication is threatened. We are writing for further and fuller particulars.

CHAPMAN COHEN

(President, N.S.S., and Editor, "The Freethinker.")

It is only fair to the minister in question to say that there is no evidence that he was in any way a bad servant of the "Lord." He did what every Christian preacher was almost compelled to do. He informed Bradlaugh's father that his son was becoming sceptical with regard to religion, and that is what almost every preacher would feel compelled to do. The fault lay with the Christian religion, which has the quality of turning good into bad and exalting badness to the dignified position of a religious duty. There is not a preacher that we have come across who has not to some extent and on some occasions acted in the same manner as Bradlaugh's parson.

We congratulate the local Press of Blackburn on its treatment of those who object to the Town Council confining the freedom of the parks for the holding of meetings to the Churches. There appears to be a fair allotment of space for those who really attach some meaning to "democratic rule" Not to allow any meetings in the parks may be a defensible rule, but to confine the freedom of the parks to religious bodies is one of those actions which give grounds for foreigners charging us with hypocrisy. We hope the more liberal-minded in Blackburn will keep up the assault on the bigots and the Press will maintain its fairness of treatment.

One correspondent of the "Northern Daily Telegraph" asks, "Why cannot Atheists be satisfied to leave others to their beliefs?" The question, a very common one, gives one an idea of the shrunken conception of citizenship that Christianity breeds. It should be not merely a legal right to attack any general beliefs that one believes to be false and harmful, it is the duty of all citizens to do so. If the early Christians had acted on that plan, Christianity would be unknown to-day. Every reform, every advance, or even change, whether religious or otherwise, every existing institution, from the Crown downward, must be open to question if progress is to continue. Progress means change. Religion always involves stagnation.

Somerset Freethinkers willing to help form a branch of the N.S.S. at Street are asked to communicate with Mr. H. Hilton, 16, High Street, Street, Somerset. Branches of the N.S.S. could be formed in many other places, wherever a local enthusiast will undertake the initial secretarial work. All possible assistance would be given by headquarters.

## THOSE "EMPTY CRADLES"

RECENT hot air from the Bishop of St. Albans on the question of the birth rate and contraceptives, quickly followed by simooms from Parliament on what is called "women's silent revolt" which "keeps the cradles empty," returns us to our own cradle days when we read, marked, learned and inwardly digested the rune that "Four-and-twenty tailors went to kill a snail, but the best man amongst them dare not touch its tail."

Well, that was the impression created upon us by the Bishops, plus Parliament.

"The causes of the decline in the birth rate are many and varied," quoth Mr. Brown, the Minister of Health, and, that being so, he announced the Government's intention "to set up an inquiry into the whole question of birth rate and population."

As he asserted that "the precise form of this inquiry is not yet determined," it is evident that any Freethinker may help by doing a spot of "inquiring" for himself or herself.

We "inquire," therefore.

Is this "empty cradle" business really a "silent" woman's revolt? Is it not also a man's revolt? Why blame the women alone?—Are the cradles really empty? Why do the Church and State demand "refills"? Is the Bishop's "anti-contraceptive" sophistry tied to the Government's "more babies" bedlam that "Church for State and State for Church shall fight and each declare the other right"?

Should not the real question be, "How can we prevent the ignorant, the vicious, the power-mad and the moral perverts, whether rich or poor, from populating the world with their children?"

None should want to prevent the poor from having babies, but should seek to prevent the poor from being so poor that their extreme of poverty, in itself, makes child-beggetting a crime. It will be time enough for Church and State to complain after they have exhibited and enacted their desire to obliterate this stage of poverty.

Why should men and women have children that they cannot take care of? Why should they not be able to offer their babies a natural expectancy of a natural span of life? Children that cannot be taken care of by their own parents will not be taken care of by either Church or State; they will be merely turned into Church and State slaves. Such children are but a burden unto their parents, unto society, and, more important still, unto themselves.

Such children become the slaves of the powers that be of both Church and State. Such children become a curse to the nations who breed them. Such children are the kind most useful to politicians and most subservient to the Church. Such children have more passion than intelligence, and their reflex action is to make the powers that be—the Church and State—more intolerant, autocratic and impudent.

A well-governed country will settle its own birth rate as a natural consequence. Hence, if this country has been well-governed in the past its birth rate is now satisfactory. If the birth rate is obviously unsatisfactory the only reason is because its Governments have been more or less rotten. Let the Government, both of State and Church, beware how they set thinkers thinking, for the Church immediately becomes suspect. Its part in the drama will be scrutinised and analysed.

For instance, when the Bishop of London said, "I would like to make a bonfire of the contraceptives and dance round it," and when the Bishop of St. Albans expressed his desire to curtail the use of them, they were not speaking without authority. They were speaking, not as voices "crying in the wilderness" alone and solo, but were the trumpets, the mouthpieces, the loud-speakers of all Church authorities.

Yet babies should be most strictly rationed. The Ministry to do the rationing should be a committee of not more than two. These should be the potential mother and the potential father, with the mother's vote counting as two votes. No baby should arrive in this world without a unanimous vote by this committee.

And now, what have the Churches done to increase the wisdom of the potential father and increase the safety and comfort of the potential mother? What have the Churches done?

They opposed the use of "those twin angels of sleep," chloroform and ether, of vaccination and inoculation. It was declared to be a sin, a crime, for a woman to lessen the pangs of childbirth. The Church declared "that woman must bear the curse of the merciful Jehovah."

To-day, the Bishops declare the same things, but use the word "contraceptives" to hide their faces under. For centuries the Church was the deadliest enemy of medicine. Doctors were the rivals of priests, and midwives but the ignorant vassals of the Church.

Nothing was done for the welfare of mother or babe except to ensure the babe's entry into the Church register. If the babe was not to be "baptised" into the Church, both mother and child were left to the mercy of the more merciful neighbours. If the mother was unmarried by Church, she and her babe-to-be could go to hell in their own way.

When Church congregations were numerous, when pews were both very full and very credulous, an occasional example would be made of some poor ignorant woman who had committed "the scarlet sin" in order to demonstrate the purity of the Church, as one might suppose if they were ignorant of the history of the Popes.

But, in those days no thought of "birth rate" troubled the Churches, so that one or two persecutions of this kind did not rest very heavily upon what passed for their "conscience." Their congregations did not dwindle seriously as a consequence of their crimes against women.

To-day the case is altered, even one absentee will often empty a whole, long pew. Women are precious to the Church, and on no account must she be debarred from motherhood, not even if she does not desire to become a mother. She must not be permitted to use contraceptives, for behold, it is "unpatriotic" and "against the law of God."

The Church destroyed, so far as it could, the best literature of the world; and, so far as it could, it suppressed all books that would have led to a common understanding and appreciation of the correct uses of anaesthetics, analgesics and such-like aids to women, even as it now would seek to obscure the understanding of contraceptive methods.

The Church regrets that the Freethinker has a long memory for these things and, Mr. Brown, dare it be suggested to you that the politicians would do well to remember that which the Church regrets.

The Church made the wife a slave, the property of her husband. This was useful when the Church had only to smile upon passion plus ignorance in the husband. It kept the pews full; it satisfied and sanctified lust at one and the same time. Chloroform, ether and contraceptives bring in little or no revenue to the Church, and so it is easily perceived why the Church is against the use of such, but still remains in favour of candles, beads and images.

B. B. B.

(To be concluded)



## WHY I BECAME A FREETHINKER

I APPEAR before the Court of Lee-ites to answer the various Bible Fanatics on the charge of "Ignorance of Christianity."

I had a Puritan father who believed, like them, every word of the Bible was holy and sacred; oftentimes he read chapters before bedtime to me. I attended Sunday school and church.

It was not until I commenced to travel the world, which I did through every continent and a score of different countries, that I realised that kindness, brotherhood and honesty was no monopoly of Christians.

In my wanderings I met many strange human patterns of the same faith; in Mexico, Christianity was tinselly and theatrical, in Scotland it was severe and cold.

In Italy it was miracle mongering; at one church there was a Feather of the Holy Ghost on exhibition, in another a bottle containing milk 2,000 years old with which the Virgin Mary suckled her God-Son, and in Spain the same kind of Christianity held sway.

I "did" Egypt and Palestine. In the latter country, at what should be the holiest place on earth to Christianity—"the Church of the Holy Sepulchre"—I found British soldiers with loaded rifles to prevent the different Christian sects from murdering one another, for they worshipped by rotation and quarrelled like Kilkenny cats; during the past few years over 200 devotees were killed in sectarian riots. There is no place on earth where there is so much intolerance.

I spent some time in India, part of the period with a Catholic priest as comrade. We stayed at native hotels to better understand the Indian people.

I studied the philosophies of the Indian prophets, the gentle Buddha, Krishna and Brahma, and many others.

I recollect vividly one day I wandered into an old Buddhist temple and read this prayer:—

"Pray unto Thy God that Thou of all the peoples of the world shall be the very last to enter Paradise.

"Ask of Thy God that every other soul shall be allowed to precede thee into Paradise."

It was a lovely prayer, and I, an agnostic, bowed my head before its beauty. No "gate-crashings," no reserved seats, no rattling of the keys to Purgatory, or Heaven—no fiery Devil to take the hindmost.

After my study in India I realised that if you gathered the crown of Christ's sayings, after eliminating the damnatory utterances, they were but echoes of the older philosophies of the Orient, and that the only new "truth" Christianity introduced was its flaming Hell, wherein unbelievers were punished for ever.

Mark Twain, a deep student of Oriental literature, summed this up in his famous epigram:—

"Christianity mouths Justice—it invented Hell.

"Christianity mouths Mercy—it invented Hell.

"Christianity mouths Charity—it invented Hell."

Listen to Saint Chrysostom:—

"Nothing is more profitable to the Church than the fear of Hell.

"Nothing makes virtue increase more than a perpetual state of dread.

"The damnation of the wicked will be an occasion of rejoicing to the Saints in glory, and excite in them a lovely sense of joy that the grace of God is making sinners suffer."

If Christianity is to regain the confidence of the common people (less than 10 per cent. of the population attend church regularly) it must be purged of its crude mythology, the picturesque Devil and Hell must go, the Miracles must go, the Raising of the

Dead, which Christ commanded Christians to practise, has gone, the idea that Disease is caused by the possession of demons, which Christ believed in, has gone.

The most highly-educated Churchmen realise this—Canon C. E. Raven, of Liverpool Cathedral, says:—

"The scheme of Orthodoxy has gone, Psychology, Textual Criticism and the scientific study of History itself, have made havoc of it. It lies in ruins."

I recommend this quotation to friend Hindmarsh: "The 'Christian Religion' is strongest in countries where education is lacking and public health neglected, as Portugal, Spain, Mexico and other backward States."

So in India I realised Christianity was but a later Palestine edition of the many Oriental mythologies, all trading the same stories of Virgin Birth, Divine Fatherhood, with the closing bloody slaughter sacrifice. Indeed, every detail of Christ's history was enacted 1,000 years previously, in Krishna's life story.

In India, too, I dreamed of a Universal Brotherhood, better and holier than the exclusive salvation of Christianity or its Oriental predecessors.

A Religion of Humanity, which should devote itself to making life on earth as happy as possible for every man, woman and child, without distinction of country, class or colour.

For all to share the world's wealth.

The world is my country,

To do good my religion.

I have been rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and have lived with poverty—and through all its ups and downs I have never altered my strict ascetic habits.

I know wealth is life's greatest illusion, I know simplicity is the key to happiness and health, and liberty of expression the supreme blessing which Mankind has visioned in its upward evolution.

The Drums of Humanity are the hearts of its 2,000 million people freed from the tyrannies of its thousand and one theologies that have imprisoned the minds of mankind too long. There are 141 different brands of Christianity in New Zealand alone, and each one claims more truth than the other one.

Have the gallant Russians opened the gate to such a world future? One gets a gleam of it in their political and economic system.

"Come and help the flag of Universal Brotherhood, creedless and libertarian, which Rationalism keeps flying."

H. J. HAYWARD.

(Reprinted from "John A. Lee's Weekly")

## EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

AT a time of social change brought about by the collapse of many institutions and traditions, it is natural for people to believe that faulty educational technique is responsible. Our methods of teaching, or what we have caused to be taught, or both, are wrong. It follows that any hopes cherished about a stable and peaceful world order are dependent upon the education of children and, to a lesser extent, the adult population to-day.

If we examine the product of the pre-war educational system one fact stands out prominently. It is that the schools and universities turned out an ever increasing flow of producers, labourers, artisans, technicians, inventors, etc., and an entirely inadequate number of administrators—political, economic and social. Technical education of all kinds flourished, and in all

highly-developed countries received the support of governments. Little attention was paid to the education of world-minded Civil Servants, of economic planning and co-ordinating specialists, of social scientists, or of experts in human relations.

A world which had solved the main problems of production did nothing to plan the scientific and equitable distribution of wealth. It preferred to limit output when production was not financially profitable to the controllers of industry. It placed the most fantastic restrictions upon the international exchange of goods and services. "Surplus" foodstuffs and crops were destroyed almost before the eyes of hungry people. British miners shivered before empty grates when coal in abundance lay beneath their feet. Socially useful inventions were liquidated at birth lest their application aggravate the already chaotic distributive agencies. Gold was mined at infinite expense and transported to the stronghold of Fort Knox in America. Economists earned rich rewards and social distinction by proving the eminent reasonableness of this madhouse. Children were not encouraged by parents or teachers to question the underlying assumptions of this Alice in Wonderland society. They accepted the world for better or worse and cheerfully helped to perpetuate its insanities and futilities.

What of the present? Educational societies, political parties and the more responsible newspapers are calling for a reformed educational system. The school leaving age must be increased. Better health facilities are required. Genuine equality of educational opportunity must be secured. New schools are necessary. Teaching methods need to be revised. Part-time education for adolescents should be enforced and adult education facilities increased.

Few thoughtful people will attempt to hinder reforms of this kind. But is the crux of the education problem affected by the changes I have mentioned? What is the use of increasing the amount of education if the content is not radically altered? Shall we not improve the culture and learning of many more people but fail to effect a material improvement in world organisation?

I think this danger is insufficiently recognised. Educational reformers meet with many obstacles, chief of which is human conservatism. Much of their energies will certainly be spent in carrying through "bread and butter" reforms. The purpose of education and the training of youngsters to perform the highly specialised functions of a rationally organised world economy may well be neglected.

Few would deny that Britain was poorly governed from 1918 to 1939. It was obvious to intelligent schoolboys that the succession of governments had no policy in home or foreign affairs other than the protection of the selfish interests of privileged minorities. Yet those governments were chosen by Parliaments elected by and responsible to the public at large. Any castigation of democratic governments and politicians applies forcibly to John and Mary Citizen. And this will be as true in the future as in the past.

Incompetent governments supported by uninformed citizens have marched the world into chaos. The same combination has conspired to ensure unsatisfactory conduct of military operations and diplomacy. While these factors obtain, the prospects of a stable world order are not encouraging, and it would seem logical for educational reformers to make a new approach. Well informed and vital citizens cannot be trained in large numbers at short notice, though much could be done to stimulate responsible citizenship. The selection of thoroughly competent politicians is immediately practicable.

With few exceptions, political and educational organisations do not insist that the "fitness for service" principle should apply to politicians. The most detailed and comprehensive blue-prints of the post-war world are published, but little attention is paid to the qualifications of the Civil Servants and politicians who will

direct the planning. Past experience makes one doubt the outcome of any major plan directed by the present brand of politicians and Civil Servants. Is not the creation of an improved selective machinery for Parliament and Whitehall the Educational Priority of 1943?

Put in this way such a conception may sound a political objective rather than an educational priority. A little reflection convinces one that the matter intimately concerns both politicians and educationists. No one can deny the existence in Britain of many thousands of astute students of politics. Such people are to be found everywhere, not the least in the teaching profession and at universities. The mobilisation of this reserve of knowledge and its application to the conduct of public affairs is very much overdue. It is merely common sense to utilise the human material at our disposal to the best advantage, and this is even more true of wisdom.

If these premises are accepted, certain conclusions follow. Chief among these is a requirement that all candidates for political responsibility be required to show evidence of their qualifications. Candidates for Parliament need to be educated to university or equivalent standards, and their initial training should be general rather than specialised. University history courses which deal minutely with a brief period in the Middle Ages are of little practical value to 20th century politicians. But a general background of world history, economics, political theory, administrative practice and modern science would seem to be indispensable. The responsibilities of local and County Councillors cannot be fulfilled by untrained persons. A high standard of education is equally necessary in their case.

Acceptance of the "fitness for service" principle is more important than controversy about the precise educational standards with which politicians should conform. The problem of standards (both ethical and academic) was solved without difficulty by such professions as medicine, law and architecture and the experience of one or two organisations which have established provisional standards for the political profession provides a useful basis. Perhaps it is wrong to call politics a "profession"! The most vital of all occupations at present includes a large number of tub-thumpers and demagogues. The hurly-burly of electioneering involving recourse to cheap and clamorous publicity campaigns certainly excludes many eminently suitable candidates from Parliament.

If political parties supported only qualified candidates this would do much to limit undignified and acrimonious conduct at elections. Educational reformers would do well to urge their organisations to pass resolutions to this effect. Far reaching reforms in education and other vital spheres would be more likely to proceed from a Parliament of qualified men and women.

Of equal importance is the fostering of adult education agencies. The gulf between governments and peoples can be bridged only in an atmosphere of positive and constructive citizenship. Helpful criticism from thoughtful citizens provides an indispensable corrective to official policies. How foolish were British governments which discouraged adverse criticism! The A.B.C.A. project needs to be expanded and parallel schemes applied to the other services. A civilian adult education plan utilising much of the experience and educational material of A.B.C.A. should be developed immediately. One would prefer to see conscription to education classes, applied to all adult civilians. At least compulsion would be serving knowledge and not militarism.

Students of education and politics should therefore take stock of the wider issues discussed here. The world knows how to produce material amenities. No useful purpose is served by multiplying productive agencies (men and machines) until a rationally organised distributive system has been worked out. Such a system requires highly-trained specialists to operate its complex machinery and informed and vital citizens to co-operate with Government agencies. The education of children and young people in social science, psychology, international affairs,

languages and public administration is the educational priority to-day. When we have learned how to share the existing abundance we may legitimately invoke science to increase the amenities of civilisation.

A quotation from Emerson aptly sums up this article:—

"Let us make our education brave and preventive. Politics is an after work, a poor patching. We are always a little late. The evil is done, the law is passed and we begin the uphill agitation for repeal of that which we ought to have prevented the enacting. We shall one day learn to supersede politics by education. What we now call our root and branch reforms of slavery, war, gambling, intemperance, is only medicating the symptoms. We must begin higher up, namely in education."

JOHN DARKER.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### RELIGION AND LIFE.

Sir,—It is only lately I have "discovered" *THE FREETHINKER*, but having seen it I only wish there were more of its analytical spirit alive in this country at the present time.

It would seem that the Church is deliberately and wickedly taking advantage of the present suffering caused by the war to rally "lost lambs" to Christ. And does it not suggest itself that the Church is doing its damndest to gain as much control as possible over people's minds—and lives—by counting on the fact that certain of our rights and privileges have necessarily been curtailed owing to the emergency? I refer, of course, to all these schemes and utterances regarding "Christian living," the Church "wanting more say in politics" (it should actually have less) and "more religion for the schools" (this is a truly dirty trick, as *THE FREETHINKER* points out, young children having too little experience and knowledge of facts to be able to "choose for themselves"). Furthermore, is it not pitiful and ridiculous that a so-called civilised country should send its soldiers to church like little children "to hear the word of God"?

Newspapers of to-day are far too squeamish in their concern not to offend the sensibilities of their more gullible and unthinking readers.—Yours, etc.,

WALTER A. NEWNES.

### HYPNOTISM OR SUGGESTION?

Sir,—May I call attention to a misuse of the word "hypnotism," and also to an implied misconception of hypnotism, in the article "Intellectual Freethought," by G. Ivor Deas, in your issue of August 15?

He says, in referring to the spirit of the times, "it is a kind of mass hypnotism; and the people, like those hypnotised in reality, believe and act without knowing exactly why they are doing so."

The word "suggestion" should replace "hypnotism," for it is mass suggestion from which the people suffer! Also, it is an error to suppose that a hypnotised person believes and acts "without knowing exactly why they are doing so," any more than they do when not hypnotised.

The old and entirely erroneous idea that hypnotised persons can be forced to accept beliefs that are against their reason, or to act against the dictates of their conscience, seems still to persist.

So far as this article is concerned, the point is insignificant, but all the same it does seem a thousand pities that a journal with so high an intellectual standard as *THE FREETHINKER*, with a world-wide circulation, should permit the fostering of a false belief that scientific investigation has exploded.—Yours, etc.,

EVELYN DALE.

### WAIT AND SEE.

Sir,—In the "Daily Telegraph" of August 14, I find the following announcement: "Britain is puzzled concerning the unnamed Day of Prayer. . . . Clergymen themselves are uncertain as to what steps they are expected to take, in view of the fact that the nature of the event they are to have in mind has

not been revealed." But surely these gentlemen are not deterred by what is really a tribute to their resourcefulness. Is it not their job to reconcile any and every event with the will of God? They are professional exponents at opportunism, they are replete with the sophistries of the theological college, and doubtless the Home Office has perfect confidence in their ability to devise a formula which will cover any eventuality.—Yours, etc.,

ELGAR SYERS.

### CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION.

Sir,—Your article on our Lady of Fatima and her pyrotechnic display, in a recent issue of our paper, brings to my mind an example of the tactics one finds in the Roman Church.

In 1910 I was employed in the St. Boniface Hospital, Winnipeg, Manitoba, which is run by the Grey Nuns of Montreal. On one occasion I was asked by one of the nuns to assist her in a rather awkward job outside my own work. I offered to do the whole thing myself, and after it was finished reported to her that it was done. As a reward she fetched and showed me a reliquary containing a little piece of linen and a finger (or toe) nail, and something else (I forget now what the other thing was). These, she assured me, were relics of the Virgin Mary, at which I said pat out that I didn't believe it. Whereupon, with a triumphant smile, she pointed to the seal in red wax of the Bishop who guaranteed the authenticity of the relics. I took the thing over to the window and examined the said seal.

Sure enough, the letters EPIS. (Episcopus "Bishop") were plainly visible, but just before and just after those letters "EPIS." the wording—if any—had been so blurred that nothing could be made of it. So I returned the reliquary to Sister with the caustic remark that only a fool would be taken in by that fraud, since the name of the Bishop and his See had been most carefully obliterated, hence there was no chance of checking up on the thing. In reply, I was informed that I was heading straight for Hell!

Anyway, a day or so later it was suddenly discovered that I was no good at all on my job (after doing it with no complaints for over four months) and I was fired. But soon after I got a job on a cattle ranch in Alberta: much heavier work, but much more to my taste being among real men.—Yours, etc.,

R. WEST.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Thursday, 7 p.m., Messrs. WOOD and PAGE; Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. E. C. SAPHIN and supporting speakers.

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. (if wet, Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate): A Lecture.

Bristol Branch N.S.S. (Durdhams Downs).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m. Mr. G. THOMPSON: A Lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. F. SMITHES: A Lecture.

Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, August 27, 7-15 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Meetings held weekly, weather permitting.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Church Street).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. J. W. BARKER: A Lecture.

Lamb-in-Rossendale. — Wednesday, September 1, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. W. A. ATKINSON: A Lecture.

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Bigg Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Padiham (near Tennis Courts).—Sunday, 3-15 p.m. and 7 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Worsthorne.—Thursday, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

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