

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIII.—No. 40

Sunday, October 3, 1943

Price Threepence.

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Russia and Religion

RELIGION and tyranny, piety and degradation went hand-in-hand in Czarist Russia. Out of a population of nearly 150,000,000 "souls"—Russia was too Christian to use the common expression "men and women"—80 per cent. could neither read nor write. It would be com-plementary to refer to the "government" of the Christian Russia that is now dead—and, we say with pleasure, has small chance of resurrection. It was so bad that the betterment of Russia under its present Government loses some of the praise it has received. For when conditions reach a certain low level the only movement possible is upward. It is also worth remembering that when the news reached our House of Commons the first inquiry put to the Government was, "Is the Czar safe?" Those who wish to get a bird's-eye view of the degradation of over-100,000,000 "souls" should read "Russian Characteristics," by E. B. Lanin (Dr. E. J. Dillon), who knew Russia at first hand. And those who desire to study a fine psychological analysis of Czarist Russia may note the following from Joseph Conrad's "Notes on Life and Letters." It is scathing in its analysis, almost unnatural in the prophetic close. Of the now dead Russia he says (he was writing in 1905):—

"The decrepit old spectre of Russia's might still faces Europe from across the teeming graves of the Russian people. This dreaded and strange apparition, bristling with bayonets, armed with chains, hung over with holy images; that something not of this world, partaking of a ravenous ghoul, still faces us with its old stupidity. . . . The Russia of our fathers, of our childhood, of middle age, can do nothing. . . . It can do nothing because it does not exist . . . could in reality be nothing else than a figure out of a nightmare seated upon a monument of fear and oppression. The true greatness does not spring from such a contemptible source. It is a matter of logical growth, of faith and courage. Its inspiration springs from the constructive instinct of the people governed by the strong hand of a collective conscience and voiced in the wisdom and counsel of men who seldom reap the reward of gratitude. . . . This very ignominy of infatuation should make clear to men's feelings and reason that the downfall of Russia's might is unavoidable. Spectral it lived and spectral it disappears without leaving a memory of a single generous deed, of a single service rendered—even voluntarily—to the polity of nations. Other despotisms have been, but none grimly fantastic in its baseness, and the beginning of whose end was so gruesomely ignoble. What is amazing is the myth of its irresistible strength which is so hard dying. . . . The conceptions

of legality, of larger patriotism, of national duties and aspirations have grown under shadow of old monarchies of Europe, which were the creation of historical necessity. There were seeds of wisdom in their very mistakes and abuses. They had a past and a future. But under the shadow of Russian autocracy nothing could grow. Russian autocracy succeeded to nothing; it had no historical past, and it cannot hope for an historical future. It can only end. . . . This despotism has been utterly un-European. Neither has it been Asiatic in its nature. Oriental despotisms belong to the history of mankind; they have left their traces on our minds and imaginations, by their splendour, by their culture, by their art, by the exploits of great conquerors. The record of their rise and decay has an intellectual value. . . . The Russian autocracy as we see it now is a thing apart. It is impossible to assign to it any rational origin in the vices, the misfortunes, the necessities of mankind. That despotism has neither a European nor an Oriental parentage; it seems to have no roots either in the institutions or the folly of the earth. It is like a curse from heaven falling in the darkness of ages upon the immense plains of forest and steppe lying dumbly on the confines of two continents.

"The revolutions of European States have never been in the nature of protests en masse against the monarchical principle; they were the risings of the people against the oppressive degeneration of legality. But there has never been any legality in Russia; she is a negation of that as of everything else. . . . For the autocracy of Holy Russia, the only conceivable self-reform is—suicide.

"Wielders of a power purchased by an unspeakable baseness of subjection to the Khans of the Tartar horde, the Princes of Russia, who in their heart of hearts had come in time to regard themselves as superior to every monarch of Europe, have never risen to be the chiefs of a nation. . . . It is safe to say tyranny, assuming a thousand protean shapes, will cling to her struggles a long time before her blind multitudes succeed at last in trampling her out of existence under their millions of bare feet."

### Russia and Rome

This deliverance of Conrad's is certainly among the finest psychological examinations of Czarist and Christian Russia with which I am acquainted, and I was strongly tempted to confine the whole of my space to a fuller quotation. But one should never forget that it was this Russia which set Hitler the example of Jewish pogroms, and with which our Churches were on such excellent terms. Nor must it be forgotten that it is to our Churches we are so deeply indebted for the circulation of the colossal lies about the aims and conduct of the Soviet

Government, and so helped Germany to mature its attack on world peace. The Soviet programme provided for freedom of religion, but it was considered impossible to permit the Russian Church the liberty it had possessed under Czardom and which it had so misused in its interests. To act otherwise would have been equal to granting Germany the right to conduct a Nazi propaganda inside the Russian borders.

Now a new step has been taken by the Russian Government with regard to freedom of religious worship. The Soviet finds itself able to give the Churches a greater freedom of organisation than they have hitherto enjoyed. It may organise among themselves, but as a Church it will not be permitted to take any part in political action. It must keep to its functions as a Church. The Churches will receive State protection but not State support, and that is all that any Church should be able to demand.

This, however, has disturbed the Roman Catholic Church, and I think we may look for that Church putting all its underground machinery into operation to prevent this country strengthening its relationship to the Soviet Union, and to do what it can to discredit the Soviet Union wherever and whenever it can. For it must be remembered that the demand of the Church is supremacy in matters of religion, morals and education. It thus becomes substantially a State within a State, and that is certainly something which the Russian Government will not permit. The hostility of the Vatican to Russia, avowed or unavowed, must be counted on, and its immediate form must be of an underground character—at least for the present. It must work to poison the relations of Russia with other countries. That is something which must be looked for.

The general attitude is well expressed in the issue of the "Catholic Herald" for September 17. Its first complaint is that nothing is said when publishing the better relations of the status of the Churches in Russia, concerning the Roman Catholic Church: save that it must fall into line with other Churches so far as its relation to the State goes. The "Herald" writes, adopting a statement of Mr. Donald Attwater, "Atheism and a materialist philosophy are not accidental and temporary in Marxism; they are fundamental and essential. Unless and until the leaders of Communism go back to their origins and entirely recast their policies, Atheism will continue to be the established religion of the U.S.S.R., implicitly if not explicitly."

Atheism as a religion is rather curious phrasing, but its meaning is fairly plain. An Atheistic system is one that has nothing to do with religion, and the Roman Church can never be on genuinely friendly terms with a State that will avowedly leave "God" outside its scope.

Another writer in the same issue of the "Herald" puts the position in more concrete terms. He complains that the Soviet Government "maintains its gaunt silence about the Catholic Church." But why should it speak specifically of the Roman Church? Presumably Roman Catholics come under the same heading as Jews, Mohammedans and others. They may practise their religion unmolested so long as they do not convert their Churches into a headquarters for political agitation. What more do the Roman Catholics expect? What more can they logically demand? The same writer complains that, while the Government has given permission for the appointment of a Patriarch and the re-institution of the Holy Synod (one

of the most dangerous organisations in Czarist Russia), "we are not told that any member of the Government or any Bolshevik official has himself decided to go to Church or do anything beyond removing his opposition against anyone else going to Church." What else can anyone reasonably demand?

Here is a significant passage from the same writer: "The official Russian spokesmen have always argued that they have never suppressed the Church in Russia. They point to that article of the Constitution which propounds the freedom of religious worship throughout the country, but they add that they discourage religion on Marxist grounds. The time has come—if Russia is to constitute not a danger but a help and a deliverance to Europe—for the verb 'discourage' to be amended into 'encourage'."

That lets the cat out of the bag—and a more impudent pussy never roamed. It is also an indication of the aims of the Roman Catholic Church: its threat to a genuine democracy and its readiness to plot against any attempt to raise the level of other organisations. Russia is to shake itself free from Czarism only to surrender to the control of "the great lying Church" and the domination of a religion that has helped in the wrecking of a great ancient civilisation and has threatened the safety of more than one modern culture.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## LAUGHTER, WIT AND HUMOUR

I hate scarce smiles, I love laughing.—WILLIAM BLAKE.

WHEN Democritus burst out laughing at the follies of the human race, everyone took him for mad; but it is those who weep, not those who laugh who are surely the foolish ones. For when there not something to laugh at in a world where, if we can but give to wisdom the semblance of folly, we can win all the populace to us? "Human justice," Flaubert once wrote, "is for me of all things in the world the most comic; one man judging another is a spectacle which would make me roar with laughter did it not fill me with pity." Even the shaving of his own beard used to strike Flaubert as highly ludicrous. His laughter had behind it, however, the tension of a sensitive man in rebellion against cruelty and stupidity. It combined the explosive derision of the vigorous Gaul with something strained, suffering and haughty. Flaubert always saw in life the juxtaposition of the grotesque and the sad.

Napoleon was known to have laughed at the most inopportune moments. On the day when Cardinal Consalvi, appalled in Roman purple, publicly presented him with a copy of the Concordat, he confounded the whole assembly by suddenly bursting into a convulsive fit of laughter—cause indeed for laughter; and when, in 1804, the Pope was anointing him as Emperor, he again shocked the spectators by yawning conspicuously throughout the entire ceremony, finding means this time, apparently, of waylaying his mirth. When Chateaubriand was returning from his wife's funeral he laughed heartily, proof, one of his friends thought, of his failing mind. Another friend, Edouard Bertie, said that on the contrary it but showed that he was in the full use of all his faculties.

Men are goaded and traduced by their ambitions, their lusts, their appetites, their frenzied caprices; whereas, if they could but once look upon themselves as comic figures in a world of comic figures, a reprieve would surely come to them:—

All things are big with jest; nothing that's plain  
But may be wittie, if thou hast the vein.

"One would be able to reduce to very little the miseries of life," wrote Diderot, "if one could look upon them as ludicrous, for even wickedness, viewed from a certain angle, has its ridiculous element; but indignation enters in, one is offended, or puts oneself in the place of he who is, and one becomes angry instead of laughing!" And yet I do not mean to imply that there are not times when laughter is not gross, cruel or shallow. I have seen a young man, generally most courteous, emit a peal of laughter at the sight of an elderly woman pushing a perambulator with distracted darts and runs across a motor road, her hat awry, and on her countenance a look of anguish and alarm. Victor Hugo recounts in his memoirs that at the beheading of Louis XVI. two priests, emissaries from the Government, sat in a carriage ogling the mild and gentle expression on the face of the unfortunate monarch, and laughing in so ribald a manner that they were remarked by all the mob. As the head fell on the block one said in a loud tone to the other: "Did you notice what fat calves the Capet had?" It is well to laugh at our own sufferings, but to laugh at the suffering of another betrays a callous heart or a cruel one. Audiences have a genius for laughing at the wrong times.

The greatest humorists have been, as a rule, lovers of life—Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Deloney, Molière. It is not venom they spit out, but gaiety and good spirits. They see, indeed, the hypocrisies, pomposities and wickedness of human conduct, but they see them free of moral judgments. "It is more human to laugh at life than to lament over it," Seneca wrote. "He deserves better of the human race also who laughs at it than he who moans it; for one allows it some measure of good hope, while the other foolishly weeps over things he despairs of seeing corrected; and, considering everything, he shows a greater mind who does not restrain his laughter than he who does not restrain his tears. . . ." Each nation has its particular quality of humour, and each century as well. There is the Cockney humour, the humour of the Paris boulevards, and Yankee humour; there is the humour of the scullery and the humour of the salon. For my part, I prefer humour either close to the bone of life, such as one hears it in the public house, the music hall and the labourer's cottage; or I like it *fine*, such as one seldom hears it at all. I do not like it strained through the mesh of class-conscious, conventional, prudish, prurient minds; nor do I like it too dry. Scotch humour I do not much care for, and Yankee humour I do not like either—shrewd, apt and arid.

An entirely new kind of humour seems to have appeared in the world in our own unhappy day, which, like the machinery that regulates our lives, is devoid of feeling altogether. Its cynicism scrapes like the edge of a mechanically-driven saw. It is glittering and merciless, and it is essentially an American product. How harmless is that particular brand of humour which the English alone seem to have cultivated—namely, the nonsense rhyme or limerick. Its sprightly futility and clever mental gymnastics, so void of intensity and honest thought, endear it particularly to the clergy, as well as to the fashionable upper classes and the pseudo-literary. The best humour is always festive, cogent and racy. It may be at times a trifle broad, but it is never lame or thin or affected.

With wit it is a different matter. "Wit," Lord Chesterfield wrote, "is so shining a quality that everybody admires it, all people fear it, and few love it unless in themselves." France has always been the true home of wit. No other nation is so supple in thought and so pointed in expression. Even the gamins on the back streets have, in lieu of coins, the retort nimble ready at once to hand out. The average Englishman takes to wit as he takes to his heels—that is to say, not at all; he stolidly stands his ground and lets come what may, making up in imperturbability what he lacks in address. "Of English wit it may be said that it too much resembles lead," Hazlitt once wrote. There have been witty Englishmen, of course. Lord Chesterfield was

witty and urbane at the same time; Sterne was witty, Byron was witty, Swift was witty, but his wit was so deadly that it was more like murder than a tourney between opponents. Indeed, English wit is apt to turn too quickly to satire. It lacks the subtle edge of the French, the practised play of the intellect—alert, lucid, civilised and restrained. The German has scarcely even learned of the existence of wit. As Voltaire said, in referring to this sober and fanatical nation: "I could wish they had fewer consonants and more wit."

The best wit if it draws blood will leave no scar. It startles with its unexpectedness, ravishes with its appositeness and instructs with its truth. Good conversationalists are seldom witty. It was remarked of Mme. de Stäel that she never uttered witticisms that could be remembered and repeated, and which, though striking in themselves, were like gun shots aimed at the ideas of others. While exciting a momentary laugh, they usually put a stop to the continuity of thought and left a silence in their wake.

Whichever way we may look at it, it is by laughter that men show their superiority over their fates. The most implacable enemies will forget their grievances at the first spontaneous laugh they are able to share in common; and whole armies would soon throw down their weapons if laughter ruled the world. No one is too stricken, too old, too poor to follow this simple method of finding pleasure. As they say in the music halls: "With a healthy sense of humour you're a millionaire," or, as Shakespeare has so wonderfully expressed it:—

The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,  
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear:  
The lamentable thing is from the best;  
The worst returns to laughter.

ALYSE GREGORY.

## ACID DROPS

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL LORD DOWDING, who is said to have played a conspicuous part in winning the Battle of Britain, told a gathering at the Simpson Service Club that he could not help feeling that there was "some special divine intervention to alter the sequel of events." It is a good thing that Lord Dowding's military skill was greater than his theological reasoning. He might have reflected that God should have intervened before Dunkirk instead of afterwards. There seems little to thank a God for who "would if he could but he did'na."

Consternation has been raging in the Roman Catholic Press lest Germany should take over the Vatican—which in substance it appears to have done. All that the Pope can do is to submit, just as though he was the head of some small secular State. But here is a chance for God's interference. Quite recently the papacy gave its sanction to one of the most impudent frauds of modern times. This was the appearance of the Virgin in person to some children at Fatima. To impress the public the sun was induced to spin round and round, just like a wheel of fire, then stood still; and, finally, for "a second and third time the same whirling dance in a fairy-like blaze of light." Now, why could not some such performance be tried on the German leaders in Rome? As it is, the papacy is being treated just as though it were a twopenny-halfpenny concern in some remote part of the Balkans. We have a suspicion that the Allied armies will prove themselves more effective in protecting the Pope than will the Virgin—with all the host of angels thrown in.

Apropos of the permission given by the Russian Government to the Russian Church to reorganise itself, the "Birmingham Post" says that "Stalin has recognised the deeply religious instincts of the Russian peoples." Which sentence contains in eight words a fallacy and absurdity. There is no such thing in existence as a religious "instinct." If there were, the Churches everywhere need not be in fear as to what will happen to religion if it is not drummed into the heads of children before they can understand what is being done to them.

The Soviet Government has given the Russian Church a greater measure of freedom in operation because it has weeded out the very considerable Russian priesthood that were instruments of evil and the ever-ready agents of the oppressors of the Russian people. The greater freedom of movement of the Russian clergy is a recognition that the education now given to the Russian people will be the best instrument against the growth of the Christian religion. Stalin has made a gesture of contempt for the Churches, and another of confidence of the growth of Atheism through the better and wider education of the people.

"The Times," more careful than the "Birmingham Post," says that the change in the attitude of the Russian Government to the Churches is due to the "undertaking of a sifting process in the ideas which became the accepted dogmas of the 1917 revolution." We are neither supporting nor attacking these ideas, but we may point out to "The Times," and to others interested, that this continuous sifting of ideas is part and parcel of the philosophy on which the Soviet system is based. There is no greater sanctity in the ideas that were held by the revolutionists in 1917 than there was in the kind of dress worn by the leaders of that date. The power and significance of the ideas adopted depends always and everywhere on the state of the people to whom they are applied. And in our judgment that is the only profitable attitude that a genuinely progressive society can adopt.

It is where ideas are stabilised in terms of hereditary privilege—when a religion boasts of being the same to-day, yesterday and for ever, and tries to make good the boast—that the well-being of society is threatened. It is because so many of our institutions and habits belong to the past that this country is not so well off as it might be. Times change; they must change—because each change, if fundamental, necessitates a change in our ideas and habits. And, as we have said many times, the great significance of the Russian Revolution lies mainly in bringing home the fact that change is possible in a very short period if we only have the strength to will it.

Another cause of lamentation among Roman Catholics—and, we expect, among our English clergy—is that in Russia 150,000 Polish children are "losing their faith." Well, there is no objection in Russia to those adult Poles to teach their children religion in Russia. We expect that the Poles are realising that while the Russian schools are educating the children they are leaving religion out; and no one knows more than Roman Catholics that once the child is educated, and religion left out until it is old enough to understand it, the chances of it becoming a Christian is very slight indeed.

We understand that Roman Catholic priests in the United States are being specially trained to be ready for action when Poland is taken out of the hands of the Germans—which cannot now be delayed for a lengthy period. The Roman Church seldom misses a chance; and Poland has been a stronghold of Roman Catholicism. But if Poland has its own Government we hope that it will be a more liberal one than that which the Germans destroyed. The certain thing is that, if the Roman Church succeeds in establishing itself first, liberal opinion will be cut down and the old semi-Nazis in Poland will find a footing for themselves.

Two falsities suggested in five lines. The "Universe" recently said: "Italian surrender follows the Holy Father's appeal for peace. The Italians surrender on terms acceptable to all the Allied Governments." But the Pope has been praying for peace ever since the war began—particularly when Italy looked like getting the worst of it. And the statement that the Italians surrendered on terms acceptable, etc., is just a plain, unadulterated lie. It was an unconditional surrender, unless the Commander-in-Chief lied to the Allies. We prefer to stand with the Commander-in-Chief.

The "Morning Advertiser" rejoices that the right of freedom of worship has been restored to Christians in Russia. But the freedom of worship was never denied to Christians in

Russia. What the Government had to do was, first of all, to break the power the Church in Russia had for corrupting the minds of the people, for it was the Church that did all it could to maintain the rule of Czarism and which played into the hands of the "Whites," who were doing what they could to upset the Soviet rule. Now that the political power of the Churches has been frustrated, Christians will be able to share the freedom that is given to Mohammedans, Jews and others in the Soviet dominion. The education given to the children in Russia, it is hoped, will be enough to prevent the Church ever again playing the corrupting part it did under the Czarist rule.

By the way, the newspapers recorded that the Archbishop of York, who went to Russia to give personal greetings to the head of the Russian ghost show, "emerged from the plane in flowing robes." What a fall? In the old days the Archbishop might have been transported on an angel's spare wings. Now the Archbishop has to travel just like an ordinary commercial traveller or mere Member of Parliament. What a fall!

The Bishop of Ely, at a Cambridge meeting the other day, "deplored the ever-increasing trend away from Christianity," but he believed that "the Church was being given by God Himself a chance to work out His truth in these chaotic times." Now that, we consider, is putting the matter very modestly. Otherwise the Bishop of Ely might have said that the Church is giving God an opportunity to live a little longer. For, after all, it is the belief of men and women that has kept all gods in being. Consider the hundreds of gods that have passed away for no other reason than that people had ceased to believe in them.

What a lot of humbugs there are about! We are shouting aloud, filling newspapers, declaring in Parliament, and preaching from pulpits that we believe in the equality of all humans. But a well-known cricketer is refused rooms in an hotel and a young woman is refused work on the land. Both committed the terrible crime of having a healthy coloured skin instead of a pimply white one. If we were in earnest in all we have said, the hotel keeper would find his licence in danger, and those who refused to work by the side of a coloured girl could be dealt with in other ways. But hypocrisy is as well planted in this country as it is in any other that might be named. So the game goes on.

The Churches saw to it that some very highly coloured notices appeared in the Press concerning the religious performances instituted by the "National Day of Prayer." Here is another side of the picture sent in by one of our readers:—

"At 11 a.m. on Friday, September 3, the machinery in a mill in a small Lancashire town came to a standstill. This was to enable the workpeople to attend a religious service in the warehouse, conducted by a local curate. Many women who lived near the mill went home to have a cup of tea in preference to the spiritual refreshment on tap, whilst the overwhelming majority of the men went into the mill yard to have a smoke. Among them was a member of the N.S.S., who decided this was an opportunity not to be lost, so, mounting an improvised platform, he made a forthright protest against the foolishness of this 'day of prayer' being obstructed during working time.

"The remainder of the fifteen minutes was filled in by an examination of prayer in relation to the war, which was listened to by a crowd that was not only interested but, by its spontaneous outburst of applause at the conclusion, demonstrated in no uncertain way its entire approval.

"In the canteen at this factory a parson has recently been giving a series of lectures on God. Questions were invited, but nobody seemed to have any except the before-mentioned Freethinker. After the third lecture the questions lengthened into discussion, with disastrous results for the reverend gentleman. At his last lecture he was obviously ill at ease, and at the end refused to allow a single question."

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. H. OLDHAM.—Thanks for letter. We would like to reprint, but restricted space forbids.

G. H. PEATE.—We note your warm appreciation of the book. There is now a great number of books with similar tendencies. The writing of books which pay at least a guarded homage to Freethought is getting an easier task.

J. G. LURTON.—Thanks, but as you will see, the matter is now—for the moment at least—closed.

*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

RECENTLY the B.B.C. arranged for a series of mawkly addresses to be delivered by Christians on the subject "Why I believe in God." They were of the usual quality, savouring of a century ago rather than presenting even a plausible justification for the belief. A number of letters, some copies of which lie before us, were sent suggesting an opposition series should be arranged on "Why I do not believe in God." Naturally, and with complete dishonesty, the B.B.C. declined the suggestion. Here is a passage from a letter explaining why. It is from Mary P. Usher, Director, Secretariat, dated September 16, who writes:—

"I would point out that your suggestion is impracticable, since the B.B.C. does not countenance the broadcasting of anti-Christian opinion. We believe that such broadcasts would be unacceptable in a country whose faith is the Christian faith."

That is quite clear, and it is a reason that decent-minded men and women would be ashamed to give. A national institution that is to be used for the broadcasting of Christian opinion and no other is to be tolerated in a country which is mouthing the lie that we are a people who believe in freedom of speech. Positively, and certainly so far as the Christian population is concerned, we believe in nothing of the kind. The claim to believe in freedom is, so far, a living lie. Non-Christians are heard, when they can be, simply because the Christian section is unable to prevent them.

We think Burns must have had institutions such as the B.B.C. in mind when he wrote:—

"Here's freedom to him that wad read.  
Here's freedom to him that wad write.  
They never feared that the truth should be heard  
But they wham the truth wad indite."

It is surely high time that men and women who have enough self-respect should decline to assist by their presence and by the reading of substantially censored addresses an institution of the character of the B.B.C. Publicity is a very

(Continued at foot of next column)

## NEW YORK "TRUTHSEEKER."

Previously acknowledged, £81 17s. 3d., "The Freethinker," September 26, 1943. Since received: E. C. Rao, £1; J. Hanson, £2 2s.; A. D. Corrick, £1 1s.; H. Silvester, 10s.; J. H. Bowles, £1 1s.; J. Edwards, 6s. 6d.; P. Northcote, 10s. 6d.; G. H. Hyde, 10s.; Mrs. K. Swift, £1; R. Birrell, £10 10s.—Total, £100 8s. 3d.

Will subscribers kindly point out any inaccuracy?

Last week we were unable to do more than announce that the "Truthseeker" was in the courts, and that in the face of legal proceedings the Customs had delivered the books that had been seized, and it is expected that the Customs will let the action go by default.

In view of the case proceeding, I asked Freethinkers to subscribe the sum of £100. I was not surprised to find that by return of post, almost, the £100 was very much over-subscribed, but in order to enable all who wished to have a finger in the pie, the sums offered were scaled down considerably. Actually, we had two men who offered, if necessary, to provide the whole amount, and there were two fifties. Greedy boggars!

But, in view of the case being dropped, and of the money collected in the United States, there will be a relatively considerable sum in excess of the amount required for fighting the case in the courts. (Of course, if the case is proceeded with, the money will be needed for legal expenses.)

In the circumstances I feel that I ought to give all subscribers for the original purpose the option of withdrawing their subscriptions in whole or part. On the other hand, the New York "Truthseeker" is, we understand, in very low water financially, and subscribers may be content to permit their subscriptions to go to the "Truthseeker" propaganda. Some legal expenses have, of course, to be cleared off. If I do not hear from subscribers within the next month, I shall take it for granted that they are satisfied with their subscriptions going to their original destination.

I cannot close without expressing my thanks for the manner in which the appeal was met. With advanced and unpopular movements poverty is a kind of guarantee of purity. Wealth and popularity have an historic tendency to corruption.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

important thing to many, and the B.B.C. sells that to scientists, to men of letters and others at the price of speakers selling their self-respect, for it must be remembered that the implement of boycott is wielded by the B.B.C., not merely in relation to religion, it runs through most of its doings. So long as the B.B.C. has a monopoly of broadcasting, and so long as it continues to give Christian priests a free hand, and openly declines to permit an opposing opinion to be heard, so long will it be a danger to national development.

The Bristol and District Branch N.S.S. are going ahead in good style. In the Kingsley Hall, Old Market Street, Bristol, Mr. G. Thompson will lecture at 3 p.m. on "Why I am Not a Christian." Mr. Thompson is usually very definite in his attitudes of belief and should be helpful in clearing away any lingering doubts concerning Christianity. The lecture is to-day (October 3).

At the Failsforth Secular School, Polo Lane, Failsforth, Mr. J. T. Brighton will lecture twice to-day (October 3). Unfortunately, the time of the lectures has not been sent to us, but in the afternoon the subject will be "Man and Morals," and in the evening "Education After the War." Those who have heard Mr. Brighton will renew the acquaintance, and those who have not are strongly advised not to miss this opportunity.

The Glasgow Branch N.S.S. opens its indoor season at 25, Hill-foot Street, Dennistoun, to-day (October 3) with a lecture by Mr. T. L. Smith on "The Rise and Fall of Italy." The lecture begins at 3 p.m. A very successful open-air season has just closed and it is hoped that all members and friends will add to the indoor meetings the additional attraction of a weekly reunion.

## A BOOK WITH A PUNCH

### I.

"FREETHINKER" readers who are on the look-out for a hard-hitting writer, with no respect for current conventionalities, should buy, borrow or steal Dr. Oscar Levy's "The Idiocy of Idealism."

It does *not* deal, as one may suppose from the title, with Bishop Berkeley's famous philosophy, but with what so many of us consider *ideals*—and I have an idea that, not only Jews and Christians, Fascists and Communists will find the book rather unpleasant for their particular beliefs, but also a good section of Freethinkers.

This seems to me to be all to the good. Some of us require to be shaken out of our complacency. We are apt to think that we, and only we, have "the goods"—and by "we" I mean all sections of the community, whatever our beliefs—and that if only everybody conformed to what we put forward, this old world of ours would become a glorious paradise. Listen to an Evangelistic Christian proudly boasting he belongs to no Church but only to Christ, and in two minutes he will prove with infallible quotations from Holy Writ that the present war is God's punishment because we refused to buy his E.C. tracts, and thus incurred God's wrath. The vegetarian will sadly tell us that if the war is not directly the result of our meat-eating with its attendant horrors of the slaughter house, still, indirectly, all our killing of innocent animals must have given us a taste for blood, and therefore . . . well, there you are. And I'm afraid I must add that I have heard members of our own party, Freethinkers, often talk as if the adoption of Freethought meant the end of every evil we are infested with. And this in spite of the known fact that on many things Freethinkers are at hopeless variance with each other.

Dr. Levy is known throughout the world as one of the translators of Nietzsche, the editor of one of the best editions of that too misunderstood writer and one of his brilliant defenders. His "Idiocy of Idealism" shows him "on the warpath at seventy," and I am glad heartily to recommend his smashing attack on some of our "profound smugness and towering self-satisfaction."

Take, for example, the word "liberty." We hear it on every side—it is one of the mainstays of the Atlantic Charter—and yet Dr. Levy has nothing but scorn for the way we are signing it away, snowed under a mass of bureaucratic forms. He quotes Lenin's famous "Liberty is a bourgeois principle" which he said "to his Bolsheviks; and the Nazis—their brethren in spirit—think the same and practice the goose step and worship in fours." And Dr. Levy continues: "Someone amongst this general rush to slavery must be able to save his personality, or, to use a religious term, to save his soul. . . ." That is why he wrote his book.

As far back as 1933 he pointed out in the "New English Weekly" how the fundamental quality of the Nazis was Jewish, just as that of the Bolsheviks was Christian. The passages are worth quoting:—

The modern Germans are less a civilised than a religious people. The religion comes, strange to say, right out of the Old Testament. The Chosen Race idea which is at the root of German mentality, springs from the soil of Israel. Israel likewise produced, long before Hitler and Goebbels, its ancestor examiners in the historical figures of Ezra and Nehemiah. They forbade all intercourse with foreign women, and even had already existing marriages nullified (Ezra x.). They, too, were all for purity of race, for power of race. The Germans following their footsteps do not know how reactionary they are and how akin spiritually to those whom they detest. . . . Bolshevism does not come out of the Old,

but out of the New Testament. Its standing up for the poor, the weak, the downtrodden, its hatred of the rich, the learned, the joyful, are evidently inspired by the teachings of the Divine Saviour himself. The revolutionary doctrines of Lenin and Trotski—this latter a Jew by race, but a Christian by soul—are clearly an imitation of Christ. . . . Communism was practised according to Holy Writ in many of the first Christian congregations. Yet when some English visitor—I think it was Bernard Shaw or Bertrand Russell or both—told Stalin that Communism was a religion, and a Christian religion at that, he was reported to have laughed in their very faces. Stalin was amused to hear that he, the Atheist, was a good Christian—as Hitler, the Aryan, would be if told that he was a good Jew.

Dr. Levy insists that a good deal of Jewish history has been deliberately falsified. David belonged to the old "merry" Israel, but when the Jews were threatened with defeat they grew ashamed of that noble king's immoral adventures: they "began to attribute their misfortunes to culpability; instead of 'mistake,' they said 'sin,' instead of 'bad luck,' they said 'guilt,' instead of 'great King,' they said 'adulterer.'"

So David's biography was re-edited, as was that of Solomon, in the light of what we call nowadays the Nonconformist conscience. To marry out of the race was more than shocking, it was a crime; and Dr. Levy shows how during the period of Israel's glory they never thought of a "pure" race. "No healthy man does," he comments. "His mind and senses turn to the fine women of all races. He feels that he himself conveys race: that he is able to impress his blood and spirit upon his descendants." The pure race theory, of course, did not affect the "healthier Germans, a Bismarck or a Nietzsche"; in fact, Nietzsche actually recommended certain Junker types, who could do with a little more intelligence, to ally themselves to Jewish women.

Dr. Levy contends that it was the Puritanism "which is characteristic of all Nazis, Marxists and Fascists" which helped to spread the pure race theory; and he supports his very lively argument with a wealth of apt illustration. The revolutionary, whatever his aims, who is so ready to obey any command, will not, I am sure, like the way in which Dr. Levy slays and slashes. Whatever revolution should, or should not be, in these days, it should be utterly submissive. In fact, "our youth," he claims, "has ceased to be revolutionary: it has again become pious and submissive to authority. It is now again all out for obedience." Revolutionary creeds are, indeed, just religion.

H. CUTNER.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### CHRISTIAN ORIGINS.

SIR,—I have been reading again "A Problem on Christian Origins," by Archibald Robertson, in "The Freethinker" of September 20, 1942.

Now, I imagine that Mr. Robertson must be familiar with Gerald Massey's "The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ," which is still being published and sold, and in which Massey argues for the personal existence of Jesus as Jehoshua Ben-Pandera, and that the mythical Christ was taken from the Egyptian mythology.

I shall be glad to know what evidence Mr. Robertson can produce against the conclusions arrived at by Massey, or whether he agrees with them.—Yours, etc.,

"ALERT."

"CHALLENGE TO RELIGION." Four Lectures. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

"THE MOTHER OF GOD." By G. W. FOOTE. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

"ROME OR REASON?" A Question for To-day. By R. G. INGERSOLL. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

## AN AGNOSTIC'S EXCURSION INTO SPACE AND TIME

THE "way of the believer" was quite simple in the "dark ages" of history. That was probably the reason why the godly preferred to burn the discoverer rather than to argue with him; still less than to be instructed. One can imagine the opposition of the Churches to the mariner who first circumnavigated the globe, hitherto regarded as flat. It was so easy for the "sky-pilots" to tell the "faithful"—and the ignorant—that heaven was "just up there" and that hell was in the opposite direction, but when it was shown that the earth was a globe, instead of a pancake, the old explanation became impossible to anyone who thought a little. Luckily for the "believer," especially for the "instructors" in the "Established Churches," it was so much easier to ignore than to explain, and Churches have ignored ever since, preferring to preach than to instruct. Still a church congregation of "flat earthites" is to be preferred to one with only a nodding acquaintance with astronomy.

As a change from the search for, or proof of the existence of, an impossible God, or a still more impossible heaven (that is, if there are any degrees of impossibility), let us make just a brief examination of the Universe, if only to see where the Christian heaven can be situated, if anywhere. We have to deal with three factors; time, speed and distance.

Sound travels in air at the rate of one mile in five seconds, but is five times as speedy in water and fifteen times as quick in iron or steel. We can take, therefore, a rate of one mile per second as a working average. Light is rather more than 186,000 times as fast as sound, and radio is as quick as light. That is why a broadcast from the London Albert Hall to New Zealand is heard there a fraction of a second before it reaches a listener seated at the back of the hall. We can, therefore, make the Christian believer a present of this fact when he states that the "voice of God" is transmitted to the "faithful" here on earth—that it is sent by wireless—but it will be found that this does not help much.

To explain enormous distances the astronomer has to take a very long measuring rod, which he calls a "light year"—that is, the distance which light travels in one year. Roughly, light travels 11 millions of miles in one minute, or 6,000,000,000,000 miles in one year, and that is the astronomer's "light year." It has also the same rate at which wireless travels.

If we take a photograph of any stars through the 100in. telescope at Mount Wilson Observatory, it will be noticed that each star shows as a disc. Actually the nearest star is too far away to show other than as a point of light, and the larger the telescope, the smaller will that point show. The fact that each star shows, in the photograph, as a disc, is due to aberration or over exposure of the plate, but for our present purpose it is sufficient to explain that it is impossible to photograph a point of light of no size at all; that which has no size, can have no existence photographically; therefore, the picture must show some size for the star to be visible at all.

The nearest star, Alpha Centauri, in the southern hemisphere sky, using our measuring rod of the "light year," is 4.51 light years away. That means that a wireless transmission from Alpha Centauri would take 4.51 years to reach the earth, travelling with the speed of light. That is the distance from the earth to the nearest star to us. Now let us jump from this star to the remotest distance in space which our largest telescope has penetrated up to the present.

In the Constellation of Pegasus are a number of nebulae which are probably distant galaxies analagous to our Milky Way, yet at a distance of at least one hundred millions of light years. Put in another way, light or radio would take at least one hundred millions of years to reach our earth. A message, to reach us now, would have had to be sent while this earth was

in a molten, if not in a gaseous, state. Yet we are invited to believe that God created all this—out of nothing—as the "Firmament showeth his handiwork." Does it? To swallow a statement such as this one would have to stretch belief to such a size and extent that we would have to use the term "light years" to describe it.

To conclude with a few words about these stars which God created in seven days. Our sun is 864,000 miles in diameter, and the earth is distant about 93,900,000 miles away. The radius of the earth's orbit is, therefore, about 184,664,000 miles across. Yet there are stars which exceed this in diameter, which means that if one of them were to be in the place of our sun, we on this earth would be inside it. To take two as examples—there are others: Betelgeux has a diameter of 216,000,000 miles, and Antares is even larger with a diameter of 390,000,000 miles, which means that this star would overlap the orbit of the earth by 205,336,000 miles.

This is what science, in the one department of astronomy, teaches us as facts which cannot be disputed, yet the clergy talk of a "reconciliation of religion with science." One can only say, in their own words, "God help them."

HERBERT CESCINSKY.

## OBITUARY

With the death of William Blaney on September 18, 1943, the Manchester Branch N.S.S. loses an old member and a past president. Mr. Blaney, who was 68, had been associated with Freethought for over 40 years, and his wife and three sons—who survive him—are also Freethinkers.

On September 21, at the Manchester Crematorium, Mr. W. A. Atkinson conducted a secular service and paid a personal tribute to the deceased.

C. McC.

## 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).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. E. C. SAPHIN and supporting speakers.

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Rev. F. H. MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A.: "Rationalism and Culture."

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3-15 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Blyth (Fountain).—Monday, October 4, 6-45 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

Fatfield (The Bridge).—Tuesday, October 5, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

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

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. H. L. SEARLE: "Science and Religion."

Bristol and District Branch N.S.S. (Kingsley Hall, Old Market Street, Bristol).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. G. THOMPSON: "Why I Am Not a Christian."

Failsworth Secular School (Pole Lane).—Sunday afternoon. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: "Man and Morals." Evening: Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: "Education After the War."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. T. L. SMITH: "The Rise and Fall of Italy."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. JOSEPH McCABE: "Religion and its Reconstruction."

## "THE FUTURE OF WELSH NONCONFORMITY"

I HAVE on previous occasions indicated that all is not well with Welsh Nonconformity (see "The Freethinker," August 16, 1942, and February 28, 1943). If confirmation of my diagnosis were necessary it can be found in a remarkable leading article, bearing the above heading, which appeared in the Welsh weekly newspaper "Y Faner" ("The Banner") for September 1, 1943. This newspaper is the oldest of the Welsh weeklies—it has just celebrated its centenary. It is one of the most widely read journals printed in Welsh. In politics it supports the Welsh Nationalist Party, but it believes in the "freedom of opinion," and its columns are open to writers holding unorthodox views. In this respect it differs from most newspapers.

But to come back to the article referred to. The author begins by saying that "one of the saddest things to 'The Banner' in the life of Wales to-day is the indifference, inactivity and helplessness of the Nonconformist denominations so far as facing the great and perplexing questions of the day is concerned, and acting in a confident and courageous manner in regard to them. . . . The Christian religion is losing ground rapidly in Wales, and the Nonconformist denominations are losing rather more ground than any of the other branches of the Christian Church amongst us."

The author goes on to say that "a minority is greatly troubled about this fact," but that the "leaders" and the "majority" are indifferent, or that they are too deficient in "faith" to act. He adds that there are numerous committees established to deal with various phases of the work, but that these committees "have done, and are doing, nothing of any real use." He adds: "All that is done is to indulge in a kind of expectancy that the multitude will again return to the bosom of the Churches, and to try and carry on the best they can till that day dawns . . . and carry on in the easiest way. That sort of thing will not do."

Then he says: "'The Banner' desires to see Nonconformity flourish in Wales, but the outlook is not hopeful. In fact, the plain truth must be told: Welsh Nonconformity is facing death." He avers, however, that it is not too late to save the situation, but that it soon will be too late. How is this to be done? Listen! "How is it possible to save it? Nonconformity which faces any missionary work must set its own house in order. It must renounce the doctrinal plague and the logical theorising which lie like an incubus on Nonconformist preaching to-day, and return to the great Christian doctrines: bringing faith again to the throne instead of reason."

How is that for full-blooded, uncompromising obscurantism? Reason must go! But it is quite refreshing to find a writer who blurts it out so plainly and innocently. As a rule, the defenders of the faith are more indefinite and tactful.

The author advocates that young people be given more opportunity in carrying out the work of the Churches; that Nonconformity should regain the courage which once it possessed; and that it should assert Welsh nationalism and the value of Welsh citizenship. He believes that when the Nonconformist churches again become real Christian churches the people will resort to their gates in great numbers. Then he asks: "In default of a Nonconformist revival what will happen?" Here is his answer:

"Perhaps a few will enter the Church of Rome—but not many. The vast majority will go into the grasp of infidelity, and it is a calamitous thing to see some of the leaders of Nonconformity worrying about the 'danger of Roman Catholicism' and ignoring the real danger—the danger of Atheism. It will be impossible to retain the civilisation of Wales, and the worthy and precious things in the traditions of the nation if our people turn to Atheism. Nothing but

disorder and barbarity and their horrors can be expected. Is there no way to avoid all this? The answer depends on the present leaders of Welsh Nonconformity. They have received a goodly heritage from their fathers—a heritage that was dearly bought. Is that heritage to be trampled to atoms under the hoofs of the monster of Atheism? Time is short; it is necessary to hurry; the eleventh hour is past."

There you are! There is the solemn warning! But are things in Wales—one of the supposed impregnable strongholds of Nonconformity—in as parlous a state as this anonymous writer seeks to make out? I don't think they are. In my opinion the article referred to was not written to try and make the Nonconformists' flesh creep by frightening them with the sinister spectre of Atheism. The object of the author was quite different: it was to create a smoke screen to cover the machinations of the Roman Catholics. And in that he has shown good tactical horse sense. A certain number of Nonconformist ministers have at last realised the "danger of Roman Catholicism." Several articles criticising the activities of the Roman Church—particularly its influence in the politics of various countries—have appeared in the weekly organs of the Welsh Congregationalists and the Welsh Baptists. Even Mr. Joseph McCabe's book, "The Papacy in Politics To-day," has been quoted with approval. This does not suit the book of the Welsh Roman Catholics at all, particularly of a small group of them which supports the Welsh Nationalist Party. Some of these, who belong to the so-called intelligentsia, are descendants of men who were prominent Nonconformists in their day. And there is no faith like the faith of a convert!

On the other hand, the prospects of Welsh Nonconformity are not rosy. As a matter of fact, the religious bodies in Wales (as elsewhere) have not recovered from the shaking up and disillusionment which followed the "World War No. 1" (1914-1918). It will have been noted that the author of the article recommends giving more opportunities to young people to take part in the work of the Churches. But the trouble, from the Churches' point of view, is that the young people do not attend the churches anyway. Report after report bewails the fact that the children who attend Sunday schools (because, in the majority of cases, their parents send them there) are "lost to the churches" when they reach the adolescent stage.

Yes; things are moving, even in "Nonconformist Wales." But the time to throw our hats in the air is not yet.

THIOS. OWEN.

### RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

We said recently that the Catholic Church may be trusted to slander and slay its enemies whenever it can. We did not mean, however, that this is a special peculiarity of the Catholic Church. It has been the common characteristic of all Christian Churches. The degrees of wickedness in practice depend entirely upon opportunities. Scratch a Christian and you find a bigot, and the strength of his bigotry depends upon the depth of his Christianity. Catholics have more Christianity than Protestants. That is the real difference between them. Consequently the Catholics are more bigoted than the Protestants. But there is Christianity enough left in the Protestants to make them persecute those who differ from them with all the bitterness of hatred and murder; and if they cannot go quite as far as Catholics it is because they are surrounded by restraining influences in the shape of science, education and free discussion. If England were in as backward a state as Spain is, in respect to such matters, the lives and liberties of leading Freethinkers would be just as insecure as they now are in the classic land of the Inquisition.

G. W. FOOTE (1909).