

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Disease and Religion

EVERYONE has heard of the theory of immunity in relation to disease. It is simple in outline, although complex in its ramifications. It is based on the observed fact that, with all diseases, some people are more resistant than others. In any epidemic, many will escape while others are attacked. There are all degrees between the two extremes, but the fact of immunity is undeniable. Thus, a disease develops, those who are susceptible to it are attacked and die; those who by some peculiarity of constitution are immune, escape, and in this way the disease gradually loses its destructive power. Of course, a bountiful and observant Providence soon gets to work, and develops a new microbe against which the organism is not protected, but that is another story. It may also be observed that the process of selection is not confined to the man. It extends to the microbe. A too virulent microbe, by destroying all that it attacked, would end by destroying its own food supply. So, while the human is modified in relation to the microbe, the microbe is modified in relation to the man. By this means a kind of working harmony is produced. The human suffers to the limit of endurance, the microbe modifies its assaults to a point consonant with its continuing to exist.

### The Religious Microbe

Now this theory of immunity fits in very curiously with what we know of the nature and progress of religion. It may not be possible to decide whether religion is due to the presence of a specific microbe, but it is indisputable that the way in which some people contract religion, while others manifest an immunity to its attacks, as well as the way in which the religious microbe is modified to meet changed conditions, presents curious analogies. First, it may be noted that religion is essentially a complaint of childhood. If it is not contracted during the years of immaturity, it is seldom acquired at all. One consequence of this is that as we have a class in the community which lives by attending to this particular complaint, we have the demand made that all children shall, wherever possible, be inoculated with this particular germ. But it is of importance to the rest of the community that children shall be given as clean a bill of health as is possible, and not be made spiritually sick, so that a certain class of self-styled specialists may live by retailing their specifics. Hence arises the quarrel in the schools between those who claim the right to inoculate children and those who resist such a claim. And so we have the curious position of society maintaining a body of men whose business it is to foster disease under the delusion that it is perfect health.

### Selection and Religion

In the case of religion, as in that of disease in general, we are presented, broadly, with two types of organism. We have that which shows a constitutional pre-disposition towards contracting religion, and that which shows an equal pre-disposition against it. Under normal conditions, the principle of immunity would have operated by preserving the non-susceptible type and, broadly, this is what has actually transpired. The number of the immune has increased, although the rate of increase has been neither rapid nor uniform. The reason for this is that its operation has been checked by an artificially induced and sustained principle of selection in a quite opposite direction. The discovery that certain people were immune to the germ of religion was made very early in the history of mankind, and prompt steps were taken to weed out the unwelcome type. Among savages, under semi-civilised and civilised conditions, the aim of an interested and powerful class has been to weed out all those who showed a lack of susceptibility to religion. The type has been, and is still, systematically discouraged. Thus, whereas in the normal way it is the type that is immune to a complaint or a disorder that is preserved, in the case of religion an artificial selection has worked to kill off the immune while preserving the susceptible. The persistence of this particular complaint, the existence of the "religious instinct," so-called (there is really no more a religious instinct than there is an instinct for diphtheria or typhoid fever), is really the expression of the fact that a form of selection has always been working for the suppression of an opposite type.

### Survival and Accommodation

But he who fights against natural tendencies finds the dice constantly loaded against him. A particular type of organism can only be perpetuated by a perpetuation of its appropriate environment. In this case, as has been said, the environment had to be sustained by artificial agencies; and in the nature of the case, a breakdown sooner or later was inevitable. In proportion, as social evolution took the power from the hands of ecclesiastical organisations and distributed it over a wider area, and in proportion as that evolution opened up new avenues of interest and employment, the type of mind susceptible to the influence of religion declined, while the opposite type began to flourish. The normal law of variation and survival began to operate more freely, and the type of mind best suited to the natural surroundings showed itself in greater numbers. But at this point another aspect of the theory of immunity begins to appear. We have already pointed out that the process of selection is twofold. There is the protective evolution of the organism against the microbe; there is also the modification of the microbe to meet the changed organism. To follow up the analogy, the microbe of religion that affected

people in the 15th or 16th centuries would be quite harmless to the people living in this. There has been a protective evolution against it. To thrive, the microbe must be of a different variety, if not of a different species. In this manner it has come about that the religious influence to which the human organism is exposed has departed as much from the primitive variety as man himself has been differentiated from his simian ancestors. Of this change, what is called "advanced religion," "New Theology" and other names, are fundamentally its expression. It is the attempt of the microbe to perpetuate itself under changed conditions. Yet withal, it retains its fundamental characteristics. It is still, for instance, parasitic in character. Its demands on the human organism are large and persistent. Its contribution to its welfare is practically nil. Such beneficial qualities as are claimed for it are clearly independent of it, and flourish as well in its absence as when it is present.

### Germ Culture and Germicide

It would be indeed astonishing in this age of microbiological investigation if some attempt had not been made to discover the microbe of this particular complaint and indicate the conditions of its development. The first part of this search has not been, as yet, completely successful; the second has been conspicuously so. We know the conditions under which the microbe of religion flourishes, and that gives us a knowledge of the conditions that make the culture of this particular germ difficult—if not impossible. Just as the microbe of malaria is destroyed by an effective system of drainage, or as that of consumption is killed by light and air, so is the germ of religion killed by the growth of more accurate knowledge, by more effective co-operation, and by a proper appreciation of the nature of the forces bearing upon human nature. The conditions of complete health here are substantially the conditions of complete health that prevail in other directions. We must have light and air—the light of knowledge and the air of freedom. It is only when these conditions prevail that perfect mental health is possible.

### A Distinction and a Policy

There is, however, one thing that marks off the complaint of religion from other ailments. With physical disease, no one is more aware of its presence than the unhappy sufferer. In the case of religion, the difficulty is to persuade the sufferer that he is really ill. He persists in the delusion that he is in a much better state of health than those around him. It is only when he has completely recovered that he recognises how pathologic his condition has been. This, of course, lifts the complaint into the region of mental disorders, and future knowledge may enable specialists to indicate, as in other complaints, the peculiar condition of the nervous system, of which the disease is the outward manifestation. Moreover, this conviction of perfect health is fostered by the conduct of those who are interested in keeping the delusion active. These persist in calling health what is really its opposite, and so induce a state of mind analogous to that induced by Christian Science. Probably, if we adopted the Chinese method with their doctors, a cure would be found for this. In old China—it is said—people paid their doctors while they were well, and stopped

payment when they were ill. If, accordingly, the clergy were paid when people were free from this complaint, and their salaries stopped the moment people showed symptoms of religion, we might hear much less of the evils of unbelief, and listen to fewer lamentations as to the decline of religion.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### WHAT IS ESCAPISM?

IT seems impossible for the average fashionable literary critic of any and every school of thought to avoid the use of terms that are, in the worst sense of that misused word, jargon. The average writer whose views are restricted by the unqualified acceptance of 20th century capitalism thinks that he has sufficiently damned a novelist when he has proved him to have sympathies with Communist ideas. And even the writers of the Left have sometimes been accused, by critics who should know better, of escapist tendencies.

Now, it appears to me that this word "escapist" is one which will bear considerable examination. In the past it has been applied with some indiscrimination (if that word is permissible), so that the romantic poems of Yeats, the detective stories of Conan Doyle, the sentimental novels of Ethel M. Dell, and the travel books of Peter Fleming have all been dubbed "escapist." I think that this is an unjustifiable extension of a word which should be far more restricted in its scope. After all, even in the Soviet Union there are musical comedies which, though they may ultimately teach a lesson in Socialism, yet attract wide audiences more for their sparkling dances and gay singing than for the political moral which lies behind the facade of gaiety.

What, then, may rightly be termed "escapism"? And—this question, I feel, should be considered as a corollary—is escapism always an altogether evil thing? Is the detective story to be condemned as wholly impossible reading for the conscientious student of affairs? I may be biased, as one who has written a number of them, but I do not think it is altogether so to be condemned. After all, it does show up anti-social conduct of one sort or another; and if it portrays policemen as impossible creatures, always on the side of the good and against the law-breaker, without sufficient analysis of whether the laws themselves are invariably beyond criticism, some such line of denigration can be advanced against the majority of the literary innovations at all periods. No doubt when Daniel Defoe wrote "Robinson Crusoe" he was accused of seducing the youth of his day with the idea that on some distant desert island there lay a better country than the sordid and unpleasant England in which he lived. We all know the attacks which were made on Charles Dickens in the early days of his career, before he was placed on an imposing pedestal out of the reach of critics. Even the mighty figure of Shakespeare was not regarded as altogether immune from attack in his own time. And in a similar fashion the writer of detective fiction is sneered at as a pure escapist, distracting the minds of youth from the task of reconstruction which should be the main concern of all progressive people at the present.

There is, of course, something in this claim. No writer of detective fiction would wish to say that his work is in the highest literary sphere; but, even so, it can be suggested with some plausibility that he provides necessary recreation for the tired mind at a time when the more serious affairs of life are pressing heavily upon scanty leisure hours. And I do not think that anyone can claim that there is an anti-social (or, for that matter, an anti-Socialist) motive in the average detective story. It is certainly not "escapism" in the worst sense. It does not provide day-dreams for the reader, by means of which he can get away from the realities of the present time to an utterly impossible past or an equally improbable future.

The writer of historical novels is likewise sometimes accused of providing a convenient avenue of escape from the troubles of our day. And some of the more superficially "romantic" historical novelists of the Wardour Street "sword and cloak" school may do this. Yet I think that all who have read Philip Lindsay's vivid picture of the Jack Cade revolt, which is to be found in his "London Bridge is Falling," will agree with me when I say that the best historical fiction interprets the past in terms which have a lesson for the present. See also Jack Lindsay's impressive trilogy about Ancient Rome—"Rome for Sale," "Caesar is Dead" and "Last Days with Cleopatra"—for an ideal example of the way in which historical fiction can provide a picture of a bygone epoch which is of the greatest value for the present time.

Not detective stories, then, nor historical fiction can be accused of the worst kind of "escapism." What remains? As I view it, only one kind of fiction—the impossibly romantic love story, looking at the world through rosy-coloured spectacles, in which every poor girl marries an earl or a duke, and in which such a wedding is portrayed as the best possible fate which can be met by any working-class woman. There are thousands of these novels in the lending libraries and on the bookstalls. You can see them being read on buses or in trains, usually by working girls, whose eyes are glued to the printed page in an expression of horrible fascination which betrays the impossible way in which they have lost the dignity of labour.

I do not suggest, of course, that all authors of "romances" of this kind write with tongue in cheek, though I am convinced that a good many of them do so. Many others may consider themselves really serious, worth-while writers, and cannot see the wide gap that separates them from, say, L. A. G. Strong or Somerset Maugham, who, while they have a class bias which most of us on the Left have cause to regret, yet do face up to reality and portray a world that is recognisably the world in which we live.

Part of the blame for this sentimentalism must, of course, be laid at the door of Hollywood. In our super-cinemas we can see the sentimental romance par excellence. "Boy meets girl." That is supposed to be the formula around which 99 films out of 100 are constructed. But it is almost always a case of "Rich boy meets poor girl." Sometimes, by a miraculous variation, it becomes "Poor boy meets rich girl," but always there is the complete ignorance of all political and social background. There is no indication that the producer has the foggiest notion of why one family is rich and another poor.

That, I think, is where the essence of true escapism lies. It is not necessarily in the complete subservience of political and social knowledge to some other theme. Even such a shrewd political commentator as G. D. H. Cole has written detective stories, but they are stories in which the Left political background is sketched in lightly. Incidentally, it is not without interest to remember that detective stories were one of the first types of literature to be suppressed by the Nazis when they seized power in Germany. No; what ranks as escapism of the worst kind is a failure to recognise any kind of social classification and a complete acceptance of the stratification of classes as supposedly admirable and acceptable by everyone but a few freaks, sometimes called Bolsheviks and sometimes Anarchists or Infidels. Of course, the writers who do this have probably never met anyone with Leftish ideas. They have no idea of the distinction between a Communist and an Anarchist. They probably think vaguely of all Left-wing publicists as people who would overthrow everything that makes life worth while, and—almost impossible to visualise—would evolve a world in which even dukes would have to do a bit of work occasionally, instead of living lives of impressive luxury in country houses.

Finally, one point more. I am not suggesting that one should lay down a political line, and say that any writer who does not toe that line must necessarily be regarded as a writer not worthy

of critical attention. There are writers who are die-hard Tories, but who, from the sheer merit of their writing, have to be considered with respect by all who appreciate fine literature. Even W. B. Yeats has been accused of Fascist-Nationalist leanings. But only those writers who show some awareness of political necessities, looking at the social situation from the Right or the Left, can be absolved from the accusation of escapism. That, as I view it, is the real criterion. S. H.

## ACID DROPS

ARCHBISHOP DOWNEY (R.C.) denounces the Government Education Bill on the avowed grounds that the Bill should never have been imposed on the country during the war. We agree; we said this when the Bill was first announced. We said it was a plot between the Government and the Churches, and that it would be forced through by all kinds of tricks, as it was created by sheer backstairs manoeuvring. So far we are with the Archbishop. But we are not aware that this Roman Catholic preacher denounced the Bill until he and his pals failed to get as much money from the Government as was desired. Up to that point the R.C. and the other pious crowd were in complete harmony. But it was because the Government dare not give more that Roman Catholics are howling. Altogether, the Bill, with plums here and bribes there and lies all round, goes forward. And there is not enough courage in Parliament to protest.

We heard recently of a case in which a dairyman, convicted of watering his milk, was not only fined, but given special censure because he happened to be a local preacher. We feel this was a little unfair to the dairyman; after all, he merely proves what we have often said—that religion and morals are kept in separate (though not always watertight) compartments.

The Earl of Glasgow, in the House of Lords debate on birching, said, among other things: "I know most of you have been caned in your youth for the good of your souls, and I cannot see any brutalising signs in your faces." His Lordship is surely looking in the wrong place for evidence. But his most valuable contribution to the question was the admission that corporal punishment is for "the good of the soul," as this denotes the religious idea that lies behind the degrading business of flogging, whether of children or adults.

In the same debate Lord Roche, a former High Court Judge, profoundly announced that: "You should flog last, and not first." We are grateful for this pearl of judicial wisdom.

Mrs. Helen Duncan, a spiritist medium, was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment under the Witchcraft Act for pretending to materialise spirit forms. As Mrs. Duncan has appealed, we must refrain from further comment on her case. But we wonder in what light an Anglican or Catholic priest would stand if charged under the same Act with pretending to materialise the flesh and blood of Jesus from wafers and wine. Perhaps, however, "proper" clergymen are exempted from this Act, as well as from the Military Service Act!

In a recent issue of the "Catholic Herald" we noticed at least two dozen advertisements describing goods or articles for the cure or relief of the many ills that human flesh is heir to, ranging from an ointment for the soothing of baby's posterior to things much more serious and troublesome. Now we appreciate the need for ordinary journals ("The Freethinker" is an extraordinary journal) to depend upon advertising revenue for their existence, and we cannot object to religious journals, even, putting more faith in £ s. d. than in God; but we do feel that, amid all the secular competition of these healing advertisements, a little corner might have been spared to boost the virtues of the Church's own infallible decoction, Holy Water. On second thoughts, however, perhaps it is true that comparisons are odious.

A columnist in the "Chatham News" writes an article in defence of Christianity, and concludes by asking: Would we give Jesus Christ a better hearing now than in A.D. 29? We have no hesitation in saying that if the Jesus of the New Testament did again what he is said to have done then, he would have a great and uproarious reception. He would not be imprisoned because he said he had come from God, or even that he was the sole son of God. Neither is now a punishable offence. And if he could feed with a handful of fishes a multitude of people, and more food left at the end of the feast than he had when it started; if he could raise another man from the dead, walk on the water and turn water into wine, he would be followed by millions. And if he required money for his campaign, the amount of wine he could sell—produced in the New Testament manner—would provide him with all he needed. Certainly if he came back, and proved that it was a genuine return, the numbers following him would make the number that gathered in A.D. 29 bear the same relation that a morning service does to a Derby day crowd.

Lord Woolton says that the cause of trouble after the close of the last war was because "materialism" was in the saddle. That is ridiculous. It was the Churches and their supporters that were in the saddle, and if our Government has its way, the same people that sold the peace before would sell it again. Let us remember that the people who built up the Russian myth are still with us. They are at present on the silent side, but they are with us and are preparing. The religious clauses in the Education Bill are one of these signs.

Let us take the case of General Dobbie. He appears to be a Christian of a very primitive type, who became "famous" because of his defence of Malta. He used plenty of prayers while he was in Malta, but we have a suspicion that the courage of the natives, the work of our airmen and our Navy, had a great deal to do with it. But since the General retired he appears to spend his time in preaching a kind of primitive religion that many of the Christian leaders to-day would disown. For example, at a recent meeting in the Albert Hall he told the audience that by God's grace, when a boy at Charterhouse School, he was made to feel the burden of his sins. We can only say that God should have known better. If the General, at 14, had any serious sins, God should have looked after him better, and we believe that the Charterhouse School does not admit boys who are loaded down with real sins. The General is not such a poor weak thing as he thinks he is. He might show more gratitude to his parents and teachers for his character.

Christian education, or education in Christianity, always goes the wrong way about. Its first and last aim is to impress upon the young what sinners they are and how helpless they are without the assistance of God and his (the Catholics') son's mother. And that is quite wrong, and a teacher who does not recognise it should never be allowed to handle children. The great lesson to give a child is that its development lies in its own hands, and he can, if he will, create in himself a good and useful citizen. That is the teacher's real function. But there is only one teacher here and there who recognises it, or who has the courage to face his "bosses" and teach it.

The Rev. Joseph McCulloch is anxious to bring the clergy and the people together. That is quite natural. A tradesman must get into touch with his customers; a swindler must get in contact with his possible victim. Our parson's aim is already the aim of the clergy, and always has been. So Mr. McCulloch is not very original in laying down three rules: (1) The parson must get into touch with his possible supporters; (2) prove that it is pointless discussing unless you are willing to work with God. Both of these are almost axioms—if the parson is to do any business.

But then Mr. McCulloch trips, flounders, advises the impossible, and acts as though he was catering for fools. For his third rule is: "Make the services of the Church intelligent." But, bless the man's simplicity, Christian preachers have been trying to do that for centuries. Thousands of books have been written to do it. You simply cannot make Church service intelligent. You can make it attractive to some with singing and music. You can make it interesting if the parson drops religion and talks

about everyday affairs—without being too definite what he has to say. Or you can gather a congregation that applauds the parson's efforts—the more as they fail to understand what the devil he is talking about. But you simply cannot make a believing Church anything intelligent. We could, but we are not likely to be given the chance.

We are puzzled. Viscount Hinchinbrooke wails that there "are widespread indications of something approaching spiritual bankruptcy." "The sophists, the economists and the calculators have stolen away our faith in God." Now we do not deny that people are giving up their religious beliefs, and we rather pride ourselves that we have helped them to do it. But what is meant by the people named "stealing" Viscount Hinchinbrooke's religion? Who wants to steal it? And how is it done? We have knocked out a great many religious theories and poses, but we never stole a religion from anyone. Why should we? No one would buy it, and we are quite sure that we never bought a gilt-edged Christian document so that we might have a dose of nonsense by the time we grew senile. The Viscount is as much a puzzle as his creed.

The decay of church attendances seems world-wide and uncontrollable. At home and abroad the cry for fuller churches is general. In Johannesburg, for example, it is admitted that the waning of church life is so marked that to the Press it has very little of news value. There is a "complete lack of enthusiasm among the laity, and the general apathy finds its counterpart." Well, it is much the same in this country, but here the Government, in combination with the clergy, seem determined to give scholars as much compulsory religion as is possible.

We have now convincing evidence that the Christian religion is all moonshine. Thus, the Christian theory is based on Jesus' incarnation, that he came from heaven, was crucified, and rose again from the dead. But according to a circular which a friend sends us, Jesus went to India, died there, and his tomb lies in a building in Khan Yar Street, Sirinagar, Kashmir. The leaflet is issued from the London Mosque. That seems to settle the business, and the Churchill Government is barking up the wrong tree.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is quite a daredevil—in his way. He appointed a Commission, and the Commission has been bold enough to admit that there is much anti-Church aggression and antagonism. That is a remarkable admission, and to meet it the clergy are advised that they must go into the streets and homes and clubs and discuss daily problems. And then—? Will that seriously alter the sense—or nonsense—of the real message the clergy have to bring the people? Will men and women who have once seen through the sham of religion fail to see what they have seen because of a visit from a parson? Evidently the Archbishop and his Commission are still under the delusion that the people are of exactly the same type as the public of a century and a half ago. They do not realise that while you may fool a great many people part of the time, you cannot fool all the people all the time. The Christian doctrine remains the Christian doctrine, and the clergy bid fair to make themselves more ridiculous than they are at present.

An example of the futility of clerical talks—based on the fact that with religion you can fool most of the people all the time—was illustrated by his saying in a recent broadcast that this year will bring us near to victory. We believe that this year will also bring us nearer to 1945. Is it not something to look forward to when one realises that the Government is making plans to let the clergy boss the schools?

We fancy that one of a rather blasphemous quality looks after the American paper "Stars and Stripes," issued in London. Writing in the issue of April 5, and commenting on the film "The Song of Bernadette" he remarks that the film was written by a Jew, scripted by a Catholic, and produced by a Protestant. Well, that is as good a piece of evidence in favour of the New Testament yarn as anything to which we have listened.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. H.—The trouble just now is the paper shortage. It might help considerably if friends would use whatever influence they have to induce local printers to see what could be done in their respective areas. There are plenty of printers who receive their paper quota but who don't publish themselves.

THE Secretary of the N.S.S. wishes to acknowledge with thanks the sum of £2 for the N.S.S. Benevolent Fund from Mr. C. Deasy.

FOR "The Freethinker" Fund, as a token of his appreciation of "The Freethinker": C. Deasy, £3.

IVY HORTON.—We are sorry that we have not the time to enter into what must be a lengthy private correspondence. All we could say is dealt with week by week in these columns. You must consider that all your private opinions have been handled, from other correspondents, time after time.

"TAB CAN."—Thanks for cutting, and keen interest.

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

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## SUGAR PLUMS

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society will be held in London on Whit-Sunday, May 28. The business meetings will take place in the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and are open to all members of the Society. Delegates' credentials or current card of membership must be shown for admission. The Conference should provide the usual happy opportunities for meeting fellow-members from different parts of the country. Those coming from a distance and requiring hotel accommodation, and all wishing to join the Conference lunch party, should forward their requirements to the General Secretary, 2-3, Funnival Street, London, E.C.4, as soon as possible.

One of our readers has been good enough to remind us that our reference to the infamous evangelist Torrey was so written that it gave the impression that his chief offence was scandalising Colonel Ingersoll. This was not the case. The chief slander was against Paine. Unless our memory is at fault both of these men were involved, but stress was principally laid upon Paine. We thank the writer for the correction. He is good enough to say that: "It is the first time in nearly 50 years that I have noticed a slip on your part." But it is the second 50 that is the real test.

The "Church Times" is rather hard on the B.B.C. in reviewing its "Year Book" for 1944. It entirely ignores the way in which the B.B.C. carefully excludes any open and honest discussions while giving the air to various forms of religious belief which make the unthoughtful believe that religion is being discussed. It is not—it is merely fooling a not very intelligent circle of listeners that they are listening to a real discussion. And of the whole of the work of the B.B.C.—apart from sheer entertainment programmes—it cruelly says that when it turns to what it calls instruction, uplift and intellectual stimulus, "it can be attended to with mild profit and neglected without grave loss." We have been saying this for many years, and we are pleased to find the "Church Times" on our side.

We are pleased to learn that Mr. F. Hornibrook had a very good and satisfied audience at his lecture in Birmingham on Sunday last. He is always a racy and interesting speaker, and

no more devoted member of the N.S.S. exists. Birmingham, too, should be, as it always used to be, a first-hand centre for Secularism.

The reviewer also appears to follow us with our opinion of the "Brains Trust." Concerning the quality of what is unloaded by men and women who are always presented as representing the best brains of the nation, the reviewer says, sarcastically: "What the critics overlook is the radical fact that the Brains Trust was never intended to be an occasion for serious discussion of intellectual, philosophical, scientific and moral problems."

On the other hand, the reviewer does not appreciate the service the B.B.C. has been for keeping people satisfied with what we may call preventive education. The arrangements for the "discussion" of social problems by apparently independent persons, but which are really carefully prepared—or "doctored"—by the B.B.C.; the way in which the question of their truth and value is carefully hidden by permitting the faults of persons (a very common dodge nowadays) to be mentioned, surely deserves some thankfulness from a religious newspaper. And in politico-social matters there is a very powerful section of society that owes much to the B.B.C. for preventing any real talks on Communism or Socialism, and the wholehearted way in which it helped those who did their best—from the Prime Minister downwards—to keep the people in a state of misunderstanding of what is going on in Russia, surely deserves recognition.

In the "Sunday Dispatch" Professor Joad says:—

"I think that the arguments both for and against religion should be addressed to people through the medium which commands the greatest publicity, namely, the B.B.C."

Excellent! But an opinion is not worth much unless the one who holds it does something to secure it. And the way to bring the desired end nearer would be for men of self-respect to wash their hands of an institution which not only refuses to permit anything to be said against the Christian religion, but spends a very large amount of money and time in advertising its excellence. There is not much good done in expressing liberal opinions unless one lives up to them. Will Professor Joad have the courage to head a revolt?

That well-informed gentleman concerning the next world, the Rev. W. H. Elliot, announces, with all the certainty of a guide book to the British Isles, that "Life after death is a very vast enlargement of life as we know it here and now. . . . We mount upwards to a fuller personality." We note the assurance, but it leaves us puzzled. In this it resembles most religious explanation: it merely shifts the difficulty a peg; and reminds one of the Dickens' character who considers his financial difficulties cleared away by getting a bill renewed. If you believe that you will live after the undertaker has had his say, then for you the difficulty involved does not exist.

But death happens to be a very solid fact. It is as certain as birth. No, it is more certain than birth; for while we have no certainty of anyone being born we are certain that everyone that is born will die. And we make our arrangements with death as a certainty. We all depend upon death as an inescapable fact; and if an Atheist runs because one of his family is taken very ill, and finds that the doctor is away responding to a similar call, the odds are that the call comes from a Christian. Death is a sad fact, and we believe an inevitable and necessary one. All our social values are based upon the fact of the certainty of death. As Shelley has it, "Love would itself die were it otherwise."

But if Mr. Elliot is right he creates more difficulties than he removes. Of course, he can do that with impunity because it is the easiest thing in the world to write nonsense and then refuse both explanation and justification. But we should like to see this newspaper preacher explain what benefit man reaps by living in another world that would not be served better by his living for ever in this one. After all, we do—some of us—get wiser with the years: we know more, we expect more, and we create more. But, curiously enough, our development in all these directions has reference to this world, not to another.

A very useful letter from the pen of H. C. Shackleton appears in the "Keighley News," mainly concerned with the Sunday question, but containing some useful notes on the general quality of the Christian religion. The local press is not used nearly so much as we should like to see. We hope that Freethinkers will take the hint.

## FASCISM IN OUR MIDST

WITH regard to the Jewish question within the ranks of the Polish troops in this country, it is not surprising that Roman Catholic papers in England should be on the side of the Catholic Poles. Poland was one of the strongholds of the Catholic Church, and the Vatican would not like to find the Polish Government on too friendly relations with Atheistic Russia—particularly after the snub given the papacy by the head of the Russian Christians. The Vatican delights in fishing in muddy waters, and it is certainly not in its interest that Poland should be open to the extension of the Soviet principle. It is also significant that in none of the Catholic papers was the suggestion that the Polish Jews in the Polish army here have legitimate causes of complaint.

It may also be noted that there has been no verifiable denial of the conduct towards the Jews not being of a reprehensible character. The Jewish soldiers are not trying to evade military service. Some are already with our troops, and others are asking that their persecution may be ended by permission for them also to join the fighting ranks of the British troops. This falls into line with the fact that there is something wrong with at least sections of the Poles in this country. Why deny them what they are asking for? Surely the liberty that has been given the Poles does not include the practice of anti-Jewism?

One thing worth noting is that the Polish Government displaced by German Nazism was in all essentials a Fascist Government. There was nothing like the sweeping and open degradation of the Jews in Poland that existed in Germany, but the treatment of the Jews as an inferior people was there, and that this treatment should continue in this country is simply unbearable. The Poles have been given control over their own natives, but this surely does not, and should not, include encouragement of the practice of the worst forms of Fascism in our midst.

Already the Government has had to silence some of the out-breaks; that, we hope, was due only to some of the Poles in this country, but it would be a standing disgrace if we did not stop this nation within a nation indulging in practices that are a disgrace to a people that claim to be not only civilised, but profess to be fighting for the freedom of mankind. The immediate job for the Polish leaders should be to at least silence the Fascism in their own ranks. We must not give Russia the impression that we have no objection to a Fascist Government being established on its borders at the first opportunity. We can strike a blow for the real liberty of Poland within our own borders. Why not do it?

C. C.

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## OBITUARY

### ALDERMAN JOHN BADLAY, OF LEEDS

Alderman John Badlay, of Leeds, for many years a member of the National Secular Society and a staunch Freethinker, died on April 15, at the age of 83. Alderman Badlay, who was a former Lord Mayor of Leeds, was a member of the City Council from 1905 to 1913, and from 1932 until his death, at one period being leader of the Labour Party on the Council. He was also a member of the Liverpool City Council for some years during the period 1913-1932, when he resided in that city as a director of the Royal Liver Friendly Society.

Leaving Liberalism for the Labour movement, via the William Morris League and the I.L.P., Alderman Badlay concluded his political activities as a member of the Communist Party, which he joined last year, after being expelled from the Labour Party (in 1940) for refusing to give assurances that he would accept party discipline. In this dispute, which arose on the question of preserving the rights of free speech in the public halls of Leeds, he was supported by his old friend, Councillor J. Craig-Walker, another Freethinker, who also was expelled.

Commencing working life on a farm at the age of twelve, Alderman Badlay had a full and active life, in which well-deserved honours culminated in his election to the Lord Mayoralty of Leeds in 1937-38. He leaves a widow and a daughter, to whom the sympathy of the Freethought movement will be extended.

\* \* \*

On the occasion of Alderman Badlay's cremation, at Lawnswood, Leeds, on April 18, a most impressive Secular service took place. The Crematorium Hall was filled by the private mourners and civic representatives alone, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Leeds and the Town Clerk heading an assembly representative of every aspect of civic life. In addition, a large gathering of people had to be accommodated outside the hall, and the proceedings were broadcast to them by loudspeakers.

Mr. F. J. Corina, who, with Mr. H. L. Searle, represented the National Secular Society, conducted a purely Secular and highly dignified service, in which the music (according to Alderman Badlay's wishes) consisted of "The International" and "The Red Flag." Councillor Craig-Walker paid a deep and sincere tribute to his friend and civic colleague, and Mr. Harry Pollitt added a eulogy on behalf of his Socialist friends and co-workers in the political field.

In his address Mr. Corina said: ". . . to-day we are honouring the memory of one whose philosophy was of a different kind. John Badlay did not need the spur of belief in immortal life to find that earthly life may be full, and useful, and happy. He did not need the promise of reward in some hereafter before he could find a purpose to fulfil . . . he looked around him on the earth, at his fellow men and women, and out of humanity's crying needs he moulded for himself a purpose. . . . Theological immortality and future life he neither believed in nor desired . . . but he was fully conscious of another form of immortality—the immortality not of the individual, in some divine sphere, but of the human race on this earth. It was this consciousness of the only future life we can know anything about that inspired him . . . to leave the world a better place. . . ."

"We of the Freethought movement, like those in other movements, have to lose our friends and loved ones. Sometimes, indeed, we lose them in a double sense, for not only are they taken from us physically, but at times they are taken from us intellectually by a form of deception which claims them to be something they never were, at a time when they cannot answer for themselves. Happily, our departed friend has been spared this ignominy, for his independence of thought . . . and his final wishes were respected by those sorrowing relatives who

knew the sterling character of his philosophic outlook. Let us hope that in any other public tribute to John Badlay this aspect of his life's work, and his long association with the National Secular Society, will not be overlooked—for he was as proud of his Freethought as of his Socialism.

"John Badlay, by independence of thought and action, achieved honour, established a greater measure of justice, and was deeply loved. Thus the achievements of his well-spent life transcend the loss caused by his death, for, though we say 'Farewell,' the fruits of his work are with us still."

### THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE

I seem to see, in all the Church's themes,  
A little more than spiritual schemes,  
I seem to hear in all a parson preaches,  
Something that not for souls, but silver, reaches.  
From earliest times, the Abbey, safe and sound,  
Controlled all life in the countryside around,  
And soon the Abbot's word would signify,  
Prosper and live, or else to starve and die.  
God's benison on those who bend the knee,  
The whip for all the fools who would be free.  
So built they up a power within the land,  
The power of gold, for centuries to stand.  
When Newton studied, Galileo taught,  
With danger was the situation fraught.  
What if the multitudes should learn to think,  
And of the new-found doctrines deeply drink?  
Suppose that superstition's ugly hold  
Should chance to loosen on the Church's fold?  
What of the christening gold, the death-bed fee,  
The earthly fare to Heaven's eternity?  
The priests would then be cast aside,  
Despised as creatures in man's new found pride.  
Such things can never be! They must not live,  
Never this heresy to the world must give.  
Ply yet the lash, the fetters pile on still,  
And let them have a taste of God's great will.  
The world has lasted well without their plans,  
And God's existence all such science bans.  
What purpose then's a spiritual lord,  
If all his bounteous ways are thus ignored.  
So is it still, Not Science now but *Man*  
Who falls under the ecclesiastic ban.  
The Church contends he knows not what is right,  
But must be guided solely by the light.  
Have faith, have hope, and all your sins confess,  
But most of all have Charity and bless  
The poor Church, who, 'gainst overwhelming odds,  
Strives hard to make the temporal kingdom God's!

E. E. F. (Royal Signals).

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### MY CONFESSION: BY A CONVERTED CHRISTIAN.

Sir,—For forty years I fervently served the devil, which I consider a fair trial.

I found that he did not agree with me, so I gave him up. I then served Jesus for seven years, and was never more miserable, and no man born of woman could have been a better hypocrite than me, so I gave him up.

I now serve humanity, think of God in terms of creation, feel clean and happy in my mind, and am mixing with nice people, and my guides are "The Freethinker," Thomas Paine ("The Age of Reason") and Grant Allen ("The Evolution of the Idea of God").—Yours, etc.,

JOSEPH FREEMAN.

### CHRISTIANITY'S FUTURE

The Chairman of the Lancashire Congregational Union is very gloomy over the future of Christianity. He says people are turning their faces away from the churches; they are also turning away from Jesus as "either a hopeless idealist or a filmy unreality." Mr. Howard Davies need not be taken too seriously, for in his next sermon he will be found telling how men "yearn" for God and are coming in droves to the Cross. It all depends upon the congregation, or upon what is aimed at in the annual report. We, for our part, cannot believe that huge masses of the population are nearly so intelligent as their leaving the churches would suggest; neither do we see any evidence for believing that the people as a whole are overtaken by such semi-insanity as to rush to the churches in crowds. The sober truth is that religion will decline and Freethinking will expand. The rate of these processes will depend upon—YOU!

But there is one statement by Mr. Davies that should attract Freethinkers. This is that the Churches "still hold the children, and therein lies the Churches' hope." Now that does offer something that is deserving of consideration. It is a cowardly thing to make the safety of a system depend upon children who really cannot understand what is being taught. It is both cowardly and contemptible. And while children are exposed to this kind of policy, it means that to some extent Freethinkers have to do their work afresh with each generation. The only policy we can commend to stop this is to follow military tactics and cut off the enemy's supplies. If those who do not believe in State-taught religion, and those who do not believe in forcing religion on children in any situation, were to join hands and withdraw their children from religious instruction in school, the state of things intellectually and socially might receive a marked jolt forward.

### 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: Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Messrs. WOOD, PAGE, and other speakers.

#### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: "Moral Purpose in Shakespeare's Tragedies."

#### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place, Blackburn).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: "Christianity—What Is It?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Various speakers.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m. Debate: Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES: "Will the Christian Virtues of Humility and Meekness Serve any Purpose in the Post-war World?"

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Messrs. F. SODEN and J. W. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S.—Friday, May 5 (Alexandra Park Gates), 7 p.m. C. McCALL: A Lecture. Sunday, May 7 (Platt Fields), 3 p.m. J. V. SHORTT (Preston): A Lecture.

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Bigg Market).—Sunday 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. T. M. MOSLEY: "The Need for Freethought."

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## "OUR MINISTER"

FROM the early 1870's till the beginning of this century the Welsh lad who was considered bright—a good "learner" at school—or who was thought to be "too delicate" to go to work in the coal mine, the slate quarry, or on the land, had the choice of three careers: a shop assistant, a teacher or a Nonconformist minister.

The prestige of the ministry remained high and unimpaired till the "Welsh Revival" of 1904-5. But the leader of that "revival" was a layman, a young man named Mr. Evan Roberts. Most of the ministers of that day supported the "revival," but others, like the parson in "Tess," considered that the job was being "unskilfully botched." The "revival" subsided as suddenly as it started, and the ebb was more pronounced than most people realised at the time.

The next crisis came in 1914. Several Nonconformist ministers, in Wales as in England, acted as orators in the recruiting campaign; others were out-and-out pacifists, but the majority "laid doggo." When that war was drawing to a close, there were many prophecies of "another revival." But it didn't come. Instead, in 1921, trade depression settled, like a miasma, on the land. This depression persisted right up to 1939. It hit the Churches hard. In 1938, a deputation of Nonconformist ministers waited on Sir George Gillett, the South Wales Commissioner for the "Special Areas." They stated that Nonconformist Churches in South Wales were in debt to the tune of £250,000—most of it in respect of chapel buildings—and that this debt was paralysing the religious life of the district. Sir George was sympathetic, but all he could promise was to bring the matter to the notice of "people in England who might be interested."

During those years another phenomenon appeared: the Nonconformist Churches became more and more reluctant to "call" ministers to become their pastors. When a minister died, or moved to another district, no steps were taken in many cases to "call" another to fill the vacancy. The subject was discussed at the different conferences and annual meetings of the denominations, and the Churches were urged to mend their ways, but the results were disappointing. The matter is still being discussed occasionally, but the passive resisters seem to be sitting tight.

In 1939 this war came. The ministers were, of course, exempted from military service; and not only that, it was decided that ministerial students who had started on their college careers in September, 1939, would be allowed to continue their studies. As time went on many students completed their course. Some of them received a "call," but some did not, and these latter became liable for military service. Some ministers in the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist denomination suggested that those who had completed their course and had not received a "call" should be ordained—thereby making them automatically exempt from military service. But laymen in that denomination took a hand, and that innocent little game was nipped in the bud.

It appears, however, that not withstanding the number of pastorless churches (or perhaps because of it) the supply of ministerial students is decreasing. When two young students of 18 years of age appeared before the North Wales Appeals Tribunal recently, the principal of their college, the Rev. J. Morgan Jones, Bangor, emphasised the need of the ministry. In supporting the claim of one of the applicants he said: "The number of students was decreasing rapidly, and by the time the applicant had completed his course a large number of churches would be without a minister." The Chairman of the Tribunal remarked that the representative of one denomination had informed them that 400 of his churches would be without a minister by 1946.

That is one phase of the problem. It appears also that, in addition to the decrease in the number of ministerial students, quite a few of the younger ministers are looking for posts outside the churches. A writer in one of the Welsh weekly newspapers ("Y Faner"), under the heading "Ministerial Uneasiness," states this: "It is an interesting fact that many of the young ministers of Wales now apply for posts as Youth Organisers or Club Leaders. Indeed, it is more than interesting, it is important, and a sign of the times." He quoted two recent instances where ministers had been successful in obtaining such posts, and adds: "I had an opportunity lately to speak to people who are themselves inside the Youth Movement, and they assured me that a number of young ministers apply for every post that is advertised."

What is the cause of the "uneasiness"? Perhaps one explanation can be found in the fact that a large number of Nonconformist ministers are badly paid. In a recent issue of "Y Tyst" ("The Witness"), the official weekly organ of the Welsh Congregationalists, there appeared a letter from a correspondent on that subject. He complained that the Churches were niggardly in their contributions to the Sustentation Fund, and that there were anomalies in the way grants are made from that fund. He said: "One minister, 'A,' receives £150 per annum from the Church, another minister, 'B,' receives £110, but from the fund each receives £20, making 'A's' income £170 per annum and 'B's' £130." The editor, in a leading article, comments on the letter: "Before now we have seen ministers in poverty, and it will be a marvel to us as long as we live how some of them succeeded from succumbing to hopeless and heartbreaking despair. The circumstances of many of our ministers are a disgrace to us as a denomination." He also stresses the lack of support given to the Sustentation Fund, and adds: "The young curate who starts his career in the Episcopal Church in Wales gets £200 per annum. There is hardly a workman in the country who receives as low a wage as this." Is it any wonder that the more far-seeing of the young ministers are leaving the "sinking ship"?

That is one side of the shield. Another rather remarkable sign of the times is that the Welsh weekly newspapers (particularly "Y Faner," already mentioned) are at last prepared to give space to writers holding unorthodox views. But perhaps the most significant thing of all that has happened lately was the publication of an article in "Wales" (a quarterly literary review, inclined to be highbrow and "modern," price 2s. 6d.), under the heading "What I Want for Wales," containing the following paragraph:—

"I want to see my nation ridding itself of the cant and hypocrisy associated with its religious life, and I want to see at least 75 per cent. of the places of worship in Wales pulled down or used in a more effective way. To-day, it is not unusual for a community of roughly 3,000 people to have 17 or 20 chapels and two churches, and the result is that half the Nonconformist ministers are existing on mere pittance—preaching Sunday after Sunday to almost empty pews. But I am rather more concerned with the other side of the problem, namely, that the chapels are a positive drain upon the resources of the Welsh communities; the members are reminded Sunday after Sunday of their duties to the Chapel and the need for greater financial assistance, with the result that a wage, already inadequate to decently feed and clothe a family, is further depleted by the calls of religion."

The author of the article is Mr. H. T. Edwards, district secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Shotton. Quite a number of "reviews" of this number of "Wales" have appeared in different periodicals, but the reviewers seem to have missed (?) the above paragraph. THOS. OWEN.