

# THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Rome, God and Us

IF Rome had fallen to the Allies two days earlier we should have been able to print last week what we are now about to say. But since the destruction of our old premises we are not able to be as up to date with events as we should like. Still, we do not think that readers will have lost much on that account.

Truth to tell, "God's Providence" has been very impartial in this war. God has given as much—or as little—attention to the great as to the small, to the poor as to the rich, to the ungodly as to the godly. All have suffered alike in proportion to numbers; we believe that, in fact, as many churches have been ruined as public-houses and, also in proportion to numbers, the infant in arms and the old man or woman nearing the grave have been blotted out with divine impartiality. God's impartiality has indeed been overdone; and within our own knowledge a great many have been led to ask themselves whether their trust in "God's providence" has not been over-valued. No longer could anyone say with honesty, "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world"—for all is not right with mankind, and large numbers are already asking whether this war is a prologue to another war or an epilogue that marks the ending of the reign of thinly disguised brute force.

All the Christian Churches, at home and abroad, have come badly out of the war. They represent in action what the B.B.C. calls the "Christian tradition," and although we do not share the admiration of the B.B.C. preachers for this same tradition, we do admit its continuity. Established Christianity has been not merely the staunch supporters of war in all countries; it has done most to perpetuate wars and to embitter them, and has earnestly prayed to God to aid them in killing their fellows. In ancient Rome the decency was displayed of closing the Temples of Peace when war was in existence. Christian churches have remained open, each combatant praying for God to help him slaughter his children. Pagan Rome could maintain peace from Scotland to Babylon with an army of 400,000 men. Christianity has failed to keep the peace of the world with the number of soldiers increased a millionfold. The world peace under pagan Rome was a very real thing. Under Christian control peace is the most uncertain of uncertain things. The size and deadliness of wars have become greater century by century, until the whole civilised world has been converted into a huge battlefield. Christian peace has become a breathing spell between wars, an occasion for the invention of more and more deadly instruments of slaughter. It gives no cause for wonder that Gibbon described his great work on the fall of ancient Rome as the triumph of barbarism and religion. "Barbarism" and "Religion," "Religion" and "Barbarism." It matters not

in the least which way one places the two terms. They are one in nature, equally deadly in their operations. It was this, we fancy, that Gibbon saw and understood. He was not overcome with awe when examining the succession of the Popes which, candidly examined, give as fine a material for the matter of a Rogues' Gallery as one could find.

### Why Not Trust God?

Readers will have fresh in their minds the frantic appeals of the Pope to the Allies not to bomb or cannonade St. Peter's and other churches in Rome. Honest to his creed, the Pope should have defied the guns of either Germans or the Allies. For he claims to be the representative of God on earth. The churches in Rome are the houses of God, they are sacred places approved of God and watched over by a multitude of saints. It is these spiritual forces whom the Pope should have called in to defend the Christian churches, the Christian monuments and the Christian people of Rome from both German and Allied forces. If the Pope had been honest to his creed, he would have defied the German and Allied forces to do their worst, and the saints who are so busy with the doings of Roman Catholics should have acted to the greater glory of God and to the increased profit of the Vatican.

That is what the world *ought* to have seen. What was seen was a Pope who, like his predecessor, found no fault with Fascism till it threatened the interests of the Church. The Vatican blessed or condoned the villainies of the Germans and Spaniards when the *people* of Spain made a bid for a wider and wider life. It stood approvingly when, under the rule of Mussolini, the Vatican received a substantial sum of money, and refrained from condemning the brutality of Fascist rule. The Church took no heed when the Abyssinians were robbed of their land, and when Italian leaders amused themselves in Abyssinia with the bombing of women and children from a low level as a "rare sport." It bore quite patiently the brutalities of Germany to the Jews and others, and when it tortured and outraged Russians the Vatican failed to show itself seriously disturbed. And when a critical moment of the war arises the Pope can think only of danger done to the Christian churches, partly hiding the fact that it is not the ancient riches of Rome that the Pope is anxious to protect, but the preservation of religious interests. There has, indeed, been much confused talk about the riches of ancient Rome, a great deal of it purposely so. But we will reserve that topic for another article. At any rate, the papacy had its choice. The Pope might have wrapped his robe round his body with the same dignity that an ancient Roman wrapped himself in his toga. But the Roman papacy staked its all on inducing the Allies to, at all cost, refrain from bombing Rome, and that mainly because, if that were done, the Vatican would lose status among its dupes. But, directly

or indirectly, the artistic and scientific and literary importance of historic Rome is derived from pagan Rome—not from the Rome of the Popes. We shall see that later. The fact now we have to note is that it was behind this that the Church took shelter. When brought to the test of level-headed men, the stock of Roman Catholic heavenly immortals was not worth a bunch of carrots.

It is not as though the papacy lacks spiritual agencies on which it could call. It may be remembered by readers that the Vatican has a tremendous number of spiritual personages with whom the Pope and his followers are in touch. We recall only two recent pieces of evidence of the spiritual forces the Roman Church has at its call. These two cases are, first, the appearance of the Holy Family—Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Following the plan of the showman who exhibited the skull of Napoleon when he was a boy, and another skull of the same party when he had grown up, in this appearance of the "Holy Family" Jesus appears twice, once as a little child and again as an adult. In the first form he is in his mother's arms, in the second he is engaged blessing the crowd that has witnessed the wonderful scene. Later, the same crowd that saw this two-headed Jesus, saw something more wonderful still. Here is the account. Some 70,000 people were present:—

This huge crowd were able to contemplate a wonderful stupefying spectacle. . . . The sun appeared like a silver globe at which one could gaze without being dazzled. Then all at once the sun began to spin round, just like a wheel of fire, casting in every direction, like a gigantic magic lantern, enormous beams of green, red, blue and violet, painting the clouds, the earth and the huge crowd in the most fantastic fashion. The sun, after its magic dance of fire and colour, ceased to turn . . . and hurtled down towards the crowd crouching terror-stricken on the ground.

We must remember that this wonderful sight is guaranteed by the papacy, and is said to have been seen a few years ago. It is no tale of the Dark Ages; it belongs to the present century. And it is issued with the authority of the Church.

With these agents working for his Church, the Pope might surely have maintained a dignity that would have prevented him making so frantic an appeal not to bomb the "sacred" city. How much greater would have been the effect had one of these performances been witnessed by either British or German military officers. "Whoever," bellowed the Pope, "dares to raise a hand against Rome will be guilty of matricide in the eyes of the civilised world." One might well ask what, in view of this Fatima story, are we to think of the organisation that can trade upon the ignorance and credulity of ignorant men, women and children?

Note the Pope says: "Whoever raises a hand against Rome." There is a trick in this, as there is in most of the important Roman Catholic utterances. He was begging the Allies not to destroy the remains of Roman culture, for she was one of the mothers of the world. But the Rome that ruled a large part of the civilised world, the Rome to whom we owe so much, was not the Rome of the Catholic Church. It is pagan Rome that we have in mind when we talk of the Rome that has ruled and benefited mankind,

of the Cæsars, and also the world that came after it. And it was the Christian Church that hastened the downfall of the Rome and gave to the world the filth, the brutality, the ignorance of the Dark and Middle Ages.

I will deal with this and other phases of the subject next week.  
CHAPMAN COHEN.

## "BIGGER AND BETTER WARS"

LINNÆUS, the famous botanist, gave mankind the designation *Homo Sapiens* (Man the Wise). Obviously Linnæus knew a great deal about—plants. Professor Charles Richet, obviously knowing something about mankind, said that a more suitable designation would be *Homo Stultus* (Man the Fool).

Amongst the follies of men one of the worst is war. Mankind, of course, is the killing animal. For (driven merely by his own religious and political superstitions, the phantasies of his own crazy brain) he will kill the best of his own species to please a Celestial or Territorial Government. Nor is that all. He is busy exterminating whales, big game, fur-bearing creatures and many kinds of birds as fast as possible, as well as poisoning the fish in his rivers, estuaries and around his sea-coasts without the slightest compunction.

What philosophers call "the conflicting collectivities of to-day," with their dead-weights of inferior, low-grade populations, readily turn to mass murder (dignified by the name of patriotic war), mass robbery (dignified by the name of necessary taxation) and mass lying (dignified by the name of official propaganda). What H. G. Wells has called "a phase of political and religious insanity" has gripped the world, bursting into the frantic homicidal mania that exists to-day. Really the collective lunatics behave very like individual lunatics in their alternations.

But since mankind must fight and kill, instead of these silly out-of-date nationalistic conflicts (behind the facade of which, as Wallace, the United States Vice-President, let out recently, those whom he called "the private rulers of the world" are pursuing their financial and industrial prey), why not wars for the benefit of mankind? Is there no better war than World War No. 3, which Wallace says—and which we can all see—is preparing with a new Churchillian-promised League of Nations to help it?

There are wars we really need to wage. For instance, why not a war against Death instead of lunatic wars in favour of Death? Man has yet to discover the secrets of life and death. And why not a war against the other preventible miseries of mankind, such as cancer and old age that afflict German, English, Russian, American folk and all the rest equally? Our real enemies are not the fancied nationalistic ones, but the millions of micro-organisms that destroy us all; the intolerable conditions of probable senility and certain death; our economic exploitation by other human beings or collectivities; the poisoning or adulteration of our physical and mental food—to name but a few of them.

"Soldiers in the war for the liberation of humanity" in the German Heine's phrase are badly needed. There is no conscription in that war. There is little praise and usually little reward for such soldiers. The fighter against political or religious superstition must be satisfied with little for himself, however much he achieves for others.

The real "Great War" is the war which began in the dawn of time, which is unending, which humanity has waged, is waging and will wage until the species of mankind is extinct. That, and that alone, is the true "War for Freedom," and such temporary and trumpery nationalist-economic conflicts like the present "World War No. 2," are mere interruptions of the true

war that really matters. (Perhaps they are more than mere interruptions; it may be true to say that they are also setbacks).

Plausible political catch-words and obsolescent religious traditions are used by the political and ecclesiastical controllers to play upon the mental weaknesses of the herd. Their own daily immersion in anxieties and routine keeps the multitude believing that "the only thing that matters is the war"—meaning by that, the War for Death—and, incidentally, for material profits.

In the war for humanity, only "the understanding and competent minority," as Wells calls them, or "the happy few," as Stendhal called them, can, or will, fight. The multitude is, at present, and probably will be, incapable of conscious helpful participation in the adventure of the race towards betterment. Worse, they will be organised and exploited by the more energetic types of exploiters to oppose the abolition of war and the development of a common conception of purpose throughout mankind. Unless—and it is a big unless—there are sufficient in number or quality amongst the liberators of mankind to get the truth into the dull, bemused, propaganda-tradition-poisoned minds of the multitude. This is a stupendous task.

Low-grade salvation, 'whether in the form of political "social security" (which means permitted existence on a respectable semi-starvation basis) or religious safety (from hell and damnation) are not the best that can be offered to ordinary men and women. Nor is it all they want, as the political and ecclesiastical mountebanks seem to think. Even the poorest wage-slaves are capable of realising that there is more pleasure to be got out of life in the world than the right not to be exposed to what the Litany calls "battle, murder and sudden death" at the arbitrary whim of their governments, and the right to semi-respectable poverty upon a State old age pension—followed by a heavenly judgment to punish them for their earthly misery. People may be fools. But they are not quite such fools as that.

Which shall the war be: for Death or for Life? Surely we have had enough of these death-dealing wars, and might start one or two of those life-controlling wars instead?

But in order to do this, humanity must begin by controlling the virtuous governments of the world, which, whatever name they call themselves, have all got out of hand and become the tyrants instead of the servants of their peoples. Like the Paris mob with the guillotine, we are sick of slaughter; like Lady Macbeth, we start distractedly to look at our bloodstained hands. We have had enough of blood; let bigger and better wars with ideas for weapons, begin at once for the liberation of wretched humanity from its own toils.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

## THE DUKE, DOPE, AND A POND

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON'S "Rasselas."

WRITING in a weekly journal devoted to the Pacifist cause, with which we are not at the moment concerned, the Duke of Bedford asks plaintively: "Why do people fall for dope?" By dope is meant war propaganda. The Duke admits that he has never found a satisfactory answer. Agreed, it is a poser. However, it is supposed there must be an answer. A target has been set up. Let's have a shot at it. But before proceeding with the matter a few comparisons may not be out of place. The question may be asked with equal wonderment, "Why do people fall for the dope of Christianity?" Is there not a similarity between the dope of war propaganda and the dope of Christianity? It is certain that both have for their patron, Saint Credulity. And both are given the blessing and patent (of publicity) from Authority. Likewise, both have their wares

distributed with the injunction—open and implied—"Refuse imitations. Guaranteed pure." Any imitations are promptly stigmatised as being harmful to the user, and of having a pernicious effect on his "mind, body or estate." Manufacturers of the dope of war and the dope of religion pay lip service to truth. Lying for the greater glory of the Lord is considered necessary for the successful prosecution of Christianity, whilst lying for the greater glory of Mars is essential for the successful prosecution of war. How could it be otherwise? Can you believe the one and not the other?

Professor Gilbert Murray, in his "Myths and Ethics," says: "Truth and war are incompatible. In war time it becomes vitally important to deceive the enemy, to conceal some things, to misrepresent others, to create an atmosphere which is helpful towards winning the war, and not at all concerned with objective truth. It is no use complaining of this; it is a war-time necessity." Very well, we won't complain. After this heavy blow he applies some balm to the wound by saying: "The British Government seldom or never lies in its news." The only comment on this statement is that in deceiving the enemy we deceive ourselves. We are placed in an inescapable position. In short, we are compelled to lie. In sweeping a chimney one must expect to get sooty. Professor Gilbert Murray also says: "War between civilised and enlightened peoples had (in 1914) already become to most of us a thing almost unthinkable." And so to explain and excuse the appalling anachronism of war, lies are essential, nay imperative! "Civilised and enlightened peoples" become, in a twinkling of the eye, barbarians. Hence the problem, "Why do people fall for dope?" Well, why do they? To understand the present we must know something of the past. Religion supplies an analogy. What is the implication of the statement, "If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him"? Pretence, or the art of getting people to think in a certain way.

Children delight in playing the game of "let's pretend," or make-believe. Can any reader say that he never played such a game? This game persists when we are grown up. The ring-leader says: "Let's pretend such a country is evil, barbarous and rapacious, and let's exterminate it." And everyone, or nearly everyone, says: "Yes, let's." Come, let's be reasonable if we can, and remember our "games" with other nations since 1914 and then ask ourselves this question: Why do the common people of one country become the "common foe" of another country? The problem is the same as before—and the answer, already indicated, is make-believe. If the children in their play had provided themselves with lethal weapons and had exterminated one another, adults would utter a cry of horror and would excuse their actions by saying, "They did not know any better." But do their "elders and betters" know any better?

Edison said that man will resort to almost any device to save himself the real labour of thinking. The game of "let's pretend" is one of the devices. It is suggested that the Duke of Bedford's question is answered, and should the reader disagree, as he probably will, let him attempt a solution for himself.

In a pond, nature provides a balancing agent. For the most part the water remains clear, but at the bottom there is a layer of mud and rubbish. Left undisturbed the water, fresh and sparkling, reflects the rays of the sun, though the depths may be discerned. Now see what happens when the waters are violently agitated. The pond, formerly pellucid, becomes polluted and all is clouded over. It is a long time before it is clear again. So with man. Left to his own resources he acquits himself well enough; but stir his baser emotions with the stick of war and the passions become uncontrollable. And it is a long time before he, too, settles down again. No wonder

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## ACID DROPS

THE Archbishop of York and his Convocation are busy just now trying to re-arrange the Tables of Affinity and Kindred with regard to marriage, and so bring the law of the Church into harmony with the civil law. It is a case of much ado about nothing, for the legitimacy of a church marriage was abolished when the civil law of marriage took the field. It did not deny the right of people to go through what they called a church marriage, if they pleased; all that the secular State said was that the only legal marriage henceforth in this country was the one performed by a Registrar of Marriage appointed by the State, and it must be performed in a place licensed for that purpose. This might be a church, or registry office, or any other building. A man might be a parson and a Registrar of Marriages—most of them are so registered—but the only legally valid marriage in this country is the secular one.

When the Marriage Act came into operation most of the clergy did what they could to hide its real nature, and its supplanting of the legality of religious marriages. It must be borne in mind that the State raised no objection to a religious service for those who wished to have one. People could go to any of the numerous Churches, and to any kind of Church, the minister of religion might be a half-shaven Roman priest, or a curly haired curate, or any of the huge number of religious futilities that can be found scheduled in a good Year Book. Many of the clergy denounced the civil law of marriage as not being a "real marriage," and so imposed upon large numbers of ignorant people. Even today, although the validity of the civic marriage is not questioned save by the very ignorant of the laity, and the very, very religious of the clergy, one meets with both men and women who on hearing that friend or acquaintance has been married in a registrar's office, remark with a solemn shake of their head, "It doesn't seem a *real* marriage." Ignorance dies slowly in connection with most matters, but where religion is concerned one has almost to wait for its elimination by the slowest of slow processes—that of sheer growth. In passing, one may add that our secular marriage law is based on the old Roman idea of marriage as a contract between two people. Also, it may be pointed out that the Marriage Act hit the clergy in the most sensitive parts—it seriously affected their incomes and their status.

There is an old saying that truth will out, which is not true, because it is only now and then that truth does "out" to any considerable extent. It took a thousand years for a very little bit of the truth of the Christian religion to "out," and even today, while there is a considerable amount of truth "out" for those who wish to have it, there is an unwritten agreement among multitudes—authors, newspaper scribblers, politicians and parsons who are determined that not too much truth shall "out." And look at the world war! We have been fighting it for over four years and who is there who will claim that the truth has come fully "out"? Now and again a chunk of truth concerning politics, religion, royalty, and the people, is permitted to come "out." But not too much.

Still the majority of people like these chippy sayings, and the Rev. Mr. Needham, Vicar of Conisbrough, Doncaster, says in a recent issue of the "Leader," "That the Church is sick today is as true as that the average man is sick of the Church." And the main reason for speaking quite plainly is that the lower placed order of preachers are very badly paid. That, we agree, is a good reason, from the trade union point of view, for kicking against the pricks, but the general theory is that God calls a parson to his post, and having called the poor parson to his service it should be God's purpose to so "move the hearts" of the Church leaders to see that the little men get properly paid. But surely all this goes to prove that parsons are just ordinary people, disguising that their real reason for becoming a preacher is that which animates any young man in choosing a trade. The chief distinction is that there is greater honesty exhibited in the choice of an ordinary trade or profession than there is in the choice of a religious one.

In an article on the "Treasures of the Vatican" in the "Sunday Express," Mr. Stuart Martin enumerates most of the well-known ones, such as the Sistine Chapel and the paintings of Leonardo, Raphael, etc.; but he also adds a few of the more precious ones peculiar to Roman Catholicism. One of these is the famous "handkerchief of St. Veronica," the one with which Jesus wiped his face when he went to Calvary and managed, in so doing, to imprint a perfect likeness of himself upon it. This was a genuine miracle, for nobody else has ever managed to print a perfect likeness of himself on a hanky when rubbing his face. There is also the 7ft. lance of St. Longinus which pierced the Saviour's side; and, of course, though nobody ever is allowed to see it, the "traditional" tomb of St. Peter. Mr. Martin does not mention them, but there are also a number of pieces of the original Cross, as well as the nails used for piercing Jesus; and we seem to remember there are also some bits of Mary's lingerie as well as a bottle of her milk.

It is reported that there are 90 Catholic members in the U.S.A. House of Representatives. That means 90 members who will, in the main, be tempted to vote against anything that tends to weaken the power of the papacy in the United States. One Congressman is now asking that a Roman Catholic chaplain shall be appointed in order to look after the spiritual state of these 90 members. One remembers Ingersoll's interpretation of the House opening with prayer from a chaplain. He suggested that the chaplain looks round at the members and then prays for the people.

Archbishop Downey (R.C.) complains that "on every side we hear talk of the religion of science, the religion of art, religion of nature," etc. For once in a while we agree with a Roman Catholic dignitary. We have always protested against this policy of calling anything a religion, except when it is a religion. Mainly it is a cover for cowardice or the expression of a sadly muddled mind. Religion has to do with the gods, and when it is not concerned with them it is not religion. It stands for either mental confusion or serves as a cloak for timidity.

Having so far agreed with Archbishop Downey we stop there, for we find that his definition of religion is the "religion of our Lord Jesus Christ." Which is nonsense. There are sackfuls of gods besides the God Jesus, and what is very much to the point these other gods are, as gods, of the same quality as Jesus Christ. Downey—rather a suspicious name in this connection—knows this to be true as well as we do. We should be much interested to hear from him in just what essential particulars Jesus Christ differs from other gods; and please, please, don't serve us up with a dose of mere morals which are no more the property of Jesus than they are myriads of human beings who had, and have, no belief in the God Jesus Christ.

Of course, we have not, and never have had, any disbelief in Jesus Christ being a God. We have always insisted that Jesus was nothing but a God—a pure, unadulterated God. That is why we have no belief in him.

As our readers now have noted, we are always—with qualifications—on the side of those who will have Jesus, the whole Jesus, and nothing but Jesus. It is damned silly, but what would you? A man cannot be logical in matters of real religion unless he is silly. Religion does not rest on logic and sound reasoning, but upon a mixture of ancient foolishness and modern humbug. So we agree with the "Church Times" when it says that "Christ must be preached within the context of the fully orb'd Trinitarian gospel." Good! The "Church Times" and "The Freethinker" are in agreement. We want the real Jesus, the one who was one of three and yet without there being more than one in the show; the Jesus who was the same age as his father, and the father who was no older than his son. The "Church Times" is at liberty to declare that it has on its side with regard to Jesus, the much hated and perhaps much envied paper, "The Freethinker."

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. LUFF.—A "condensed" edition of Comte's "Positive Philosophy," translated by Harriet Martineau, was issued in 1853. The work runs to nearly 1,000 pages—in two volumes.

"ALERT."—Will appear in next issue.

G. COLBROOKE.—Pleased you so enjoyed the evening meeting. Shall be pleased to meet you, but if you can tell us when you will call, it would be best to advise us.

N. CHARLTON.—We note your Blackburn meeting, and glad to know it was successful. We are looking forward to greater activity of the branches so soon as the war pressure declines.

R. LYNN.—We do not print every article because we agree with it, but because it represents a point of view that is worth stating. We disagree always with some things that appear, and sometimes in the manner of expressing opinion which coincides with our own. But the road to agreement is by disagreement, and when one disagreement is worked out, we must straightway find more. We must find out fresh disagreements if development is to be continuous.

S. GORDON BOX.—Some Sunday meetings may be attempted in the autumn. We note your appreciation of the Sunday evening meeting.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges a donation of 3s. from Mr. H. Zolkwer to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

FOR "THE FREETHINKER."—M. Feldman, £1.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

MR. CORINA'S "God and the Co-op." is selling well, and should prove useful in many ways. All the Churches stood aloof from the movement, and the majority of those connected with the establishment of the Co-operative movement were either Freethinkers or men with little status with the Churches. One sees this most clearly if one goes back beyond the period covered by the anniversary. This deals, of course, with the anniversary of the Rochdale movement. That dates from 1844. But the London Co-operative Society was founded in 1826, and a Co-operative Journal was issued in 1830. And it is in the early struggles of the movement that one sees the influence of Freethinkers. "God and the Co-op." is published at 2d.; twelve copies for 2s., post free.

The invasion of the Continent was a masterpiece of organisation. The men were trained to the minute, every detail of arms, equipment, supplies, etc., had been carefully planned and worked

out. The religious barrage was tremendous, being opened by the King and closed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Everything that human foresight could anticipate was checked, counter-checked and met. Only one thing was left in the hands of God: the weather, and that was badly bungled. The invasion had to be postponed for 24 hours owing to the weather, and then was carried out in anything but favourable conditions. God seems to be uncertain as to which side he is on, and it might be helpful to the intelligence department of the Churches in this country to remind them that God has interests on both sides.

We were glad to note an excellent letter which appeared in the "Oxford Times" for May 26, dealing with the utterly misleading claims of Christian leaders with regard to social reform. The writer is Mr. W. Hawley, whose name we do not recall, but we hope to hear more of his activities. Mr. Hawley meets the claims of modern Christians with regard to reform by saying:—

"The great upward movement (early 19th century) was carried out by men and women like Francis Place, Holyoake, Robert Owen, Bentham, Shelley, Burdett, Mill, Stewart, Grote, Elizabeth Fry, Harriet Martineau, Richard Carlile, Sadler, Lord Brougham, Leigh Hunt and others. . . . With regard to education . . . in 1831 the Archbishop of Canterbury pronounced the Reform Bill mischievous, and Bishop Hooley said, 'I do not know what the mass of the people in any country have to do with the laws but to obey them.' . . . In 1833 the Government of England made its first grant to Education; it was £20,000. A few years later £10,000 was granted for the royal stables."

Mr. Hawley is a new name to us, but we hope to note more of his activities.

A crowded London bus drew up at a compulsory stop. The waiting crowd contained a fully-robed Catholic priest, about the eighth in the queue. The conductor called out, "Full up; can't take any more." There was a plea from some idiot in the queue, "Oh! Let the priest get on." The conductor went upstairs about his business, unimpressed by the robes of Rome, impartial to the plea of the queening sychophant. In a moment the conductor returned to the platform, and was astonished to see the priest aboard the bus. He signalled to the driver, and as the vehicle stopped, he remarked firmly, "I said 'full up'!" The priest stepped off without a murmur. Would that other people in our public services, in less humble walks of life, had the courage to stand up with similar fairness and conscientiousness to this much pampered class. Would that others had the wisdom he displayed when he turned to the passengers inside the bus and said, "He's no better to me than anybody else in that queue." We have often said that it is only because of the cowardice of people that priests and the like can "get away with it."

Father Lewis Watt, S.J., in a lecture at St. Bede's Grammar School, Bradford, said he had been told that many workers employed by large firms seemed to lose their honesty in dealing with the possessions and property of their employers. The position, he added, had largely resulted from the growth of agnosticism and atheism. Once a man had lost his faith in God his social and commercial morality suffered. Now although we prefer to pick out the creditable things in the record of any person or institution, in this case Father Watt has asked for it, and we cannot be blamed for reminding him that the faith in God demonstrated by Roman Catholics produces by far and away the largest number not only of juvenile delinquents, but also of our adult prison populations.

And while on the subject of large firms, and their possessions and property, what about the large firm whose head office is at the Vatican? Here we find a reversal of the process complained of by Father Watt. Instead of employees robbing the firm, we find the firm carrying out the biggest fraud in human history, cheating its customers, and acquiring ill-gotten wealth on a scale that would make the biggest bucket-shop racket look like a little pocket-picking expedition in comparison.

## MYSTICISM AND THE ARTS

NOTHING, I know, can be more infuriating to the reader than to be given the later stages of an argument, the earlier part of which has missed him. Yet I feel that a discussion which started in "Partisan Review," published in New York and continued in the British occasional miscellany, "Now," 1944, can justly be given a column or two in "The Freethinker."

The whole affair, I should explain, started with the publication of an issue of "Partisan Review," devoted to what it called the "new failure of nerve" in Western Liberalism—using that term "Liberalism" in its widest possible connotation. The tendencies which the editors of "Partisan Review" regarded as retrograde, obscurantist, or reactionary included these: the abandonment of the historical for the metaphysical approach to politics and ethics, a return to the idea of Original Sin, and the reappearance of the quasi-religious view (which cannot stand logical argument) in place of the quasi-scientific view (which can be argued logically). The points of that statement, I feel, will be thoroughly appreciated by Freethinkers. We should agree that all these things are thoroughly reactionary, leading to many kinds of emotional excesses, both in the arts and outside that possibly limited sphere.

But now let me turn to the other side of the argument. In the current issue of "Now," which is a miscellany of prose and verse, published by the Freedom Press and appearing at irregular intervals, Alex Comfort, who is one of the most interesting of the younger writers, takes up this discussion in an exciting article entitled "Art and Social Responsibility." With much of what he has to say, most artists and most Freethinkers would be in cordial agreement. For instance, he says that he thinks of a world at war as a world temporarily insane, and, in his function as artist, he has somehow to keep his creative faculties alive by isolation from the conflicting forces which are tearing the world in two. That is, at any rate, an arguable point of view, and one which will not be condemned even by those who do not altogether agree with it. But when he comes to discuss the "reactionary" ideas of the "Partisan Review" he ventures, to my mind, on ground which is far more dangerous for the artist and the original thinker. Space will not permit me to write at great length, or to quote from Comfort's important article as I should like. However, let me try, as well as I can, to summarise his main points:—

(1) That history is not a process which is amenable to reason. It is not to be regarded as a steady progress in any direction, whether moral or political.

(2) That those who cannot ignore the fact of death cannot find any intellectual significance in life.

(3) That one of the properties common to humanity throughout all historical periods is a congenital inability to form a community which does not involve the abuse of power.

From these three preliminary tenets Comfort builds up an elaborate structure of argument. He would not deny that (3) necessarily means that the old Christian doctrine of Original Sin has something to be said for it, nor would he suggest that the result of all this is to make of the artist a non-collaborator of the kind advocated by Aldous Huxley in "Ends and Means" and other recent essays in mysticism.

And that, I think, is where Comfort's new arguments bring him into an exceedingly dangerous position. Has he, I wonder, reflected on his comrades in this new mystical crusade on which he appears to be now setting out? Let me give a list of the recent writers who would no doubt agree with the three main arguments of Alex Comfort which I have set out above: T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, C. E. M. Joad, Alfred Noyes, Dorothy L. Sayers. Does Comfort really feel at home in that company? Would he not feel more at home with H. G. Wells, F. L. Lucas, Jack Lindsay, Douglas Goldring, A. L. Rowse? (I do not, of

course, mean that the people whose names I have given would be 100 per cent. for or against the case that Comfort puts forward but their general tendency is in the direction I have indicated.)

I think that artists of all kinds would do well to beware the sinister approach of the mystical attitude. Alex Comfort looks like being one of the really important writers of the next 20 or 30 years, and that is why I feel that we should spare a few lines to a consideration of his views. He is still a very young man, and he already has behind him considerable achievements. The idea of an artist isolating himself from the community and developing the technique of his art, is an attractive one for many artists, but it will not bear examination. The artist bears his responsibility. If he feels that the community is doing crazy, evil things, then he has to say so. His protest may be ineffective at the moment, and he may have to bear all kinds of martyrdom. But that will be better than retiring into ineffective isolation.

It was, I think, Lord Acton who said: "Power always corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely" (or words to that effect; my quotation may not be word for word accurate). That is really the theme of Comfort's essay in political inaction. But, even if that aphorism be literally true, we do not help the cause of art and the cause of freedom (which are one cause) by throwing overboard the principles on which all ideas of progress have been built. I feel that Comfort has been too much obsessed by the recent development of the world. Fascism is an evil thing, and it is a thing of modern growth, assisted by the machinations of the Roman Catholic Church, that dying monster which, in its death throes, has tried to involve us all with its fall. But those of us who live in an age that looks like being increasingly totalitarian should not altogether allow ourselves to become completely oblivious of the past, of the glories of Ancient Greece, or even of pre-historic Europe (vide Elliot Smith). I suggest to Alex Comfort that he extends his studies in the history of art to cover the primitives, when he will realise that there have existed communities which admired the artist and which did not show that abuse of power that has been the greatest evil of the comparatively modern period. Only by taking a very wide historical perspective can one see the true process, by which humanity has advanced. Then, if Comfort will devote a little more time to genuine progress shown by evolutionary changes operating over thousands of years, he may become a little more optimistic in his ideas.

JOHN ROWLAND.

### PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. By CHAPMAN COHEN:

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"THE BIBLE HANDBOOK." For Freethinkers and Inquiring Christians. By G. W. FOOTE with W. P. BALL. Ninth edition. The passages cited with references are under headings: Bible Contradictions. Bible Atrocities. Bible Immoralities, Indecencies and Obscenities. Bible Absurdities. Unfulfilled Prophecies and Broken Promises. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

## GOD AND THE CO-OP.

Will Religion Split the People's Movement?

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### A BIG PROBLEM

The Archdeacon of Halifax (Canon Baines) declares that one of the biggest problems after the war will be that of securing the services of efficient clergymen. He says that not more than 60 or 70 per cent. of the men in the Forces who wish to be ordained would be accepted for the ministry. Frankly, we do not think the Canon should worry. The quality of ordination candidates may be as low as he suggests, because few really intelligent men enter the ministry to-day, but it can hardly be at the low level which the Christian creed itself has reached as a factor for influence in the shaping of the world after the war. People are beginning to wake up to the fact that a creed which can offer nothing better than the present sorry mess, after 2,000 years of power in the temporal as well as the "spiritual" affairs of man, is not likely to be of much use in reorganising the destinies of humankind in the years to come.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### EDUCATION AND THE CHURCHES.

SIR,—You and I differ on all sorts of things, but I can admire courage and accuracy in men with whom I have the honour to differ—and you are a "bonnie fighter!" What you say on "Education and the Churches" is "God's truth," and some of it I have said, as your readers will know, in my book "World-birth." The Fathers of the Church will not stop at anything—even mental murder—when it suits them, for theology corrupts. These men are corrupted men.—Yours, etc.,

SHAW DESMOND.

#### IRENÆUS AND JESUS.

SIR,—The best reply to Mr. A. Robertson is to give the exact words of Irenæus:—

"He (Christ) came to save all through means of himself . . . infants and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age; becoming an infant . . . a child . . . a youth . . . So likewise he was an old man for old men . . . then at last he came to death itself, that he might be the first born from the dead . . . the Prince of Life, existing before all, and going before all. . . ."

There is nothing whatever in this passage about a Crucifixion or being mistaken about Pilate who is not mentioned either—Christ merely dies to become the Prince of Life. And in commenting upon the passage in John viii, 56-57, Irenæus says "It is altogether unreasonable to suppose that they (the Jews) were mistaken by twenty years . . . He did not want much of being fifty years old." Now, to use a favourite argument of Mr. Robertson, it is absurd to suppose that a forger would insert such a passage in the work of Irenæus, going *against* the authority of all the Gospels. On the other hand, we can well suppose that a Christian copyist, horrified to see nothing about the Crucifixion in the writings of such an eminent Church Father, set to work to repair the omission. Hence the passage upon which Mr. Robertson stakes his all. Godfrey Higgins, in the "Anacalypsis," points out that "one of the earliest, most respected, and most quoted of ancient bishops tells us, in distinct words, that Jesus was not crucified under Pontius Pilate," and Judge Waite in his "History of Christianity" does the same. And it is, in spite of Mr. Robertson, a fact.—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

#### WHAT WILL YOU PUT IN ITS PLACE?

SIR,—That is the question that Christians, for years, have levelled at Freethinkers bent on destroying the Christian creed. And what "dusty" answers we have given them. For example: "If a surgeon rid you of a boil, would you have him replace it with a pimple?"

Yet here is our own coruscant Corina inviting a like derision—which the Lord help me resist!

Mr. Corina would cut out the carbuncular Oath, but fearing its clearance not enough—sheer destruction in fact—he pre-fabricates, to replace it, a pretty ebonised pimple almost as

impressive as the carbuncle when presented in its striking print dress.

We are told that this "simple little pimple" or declaration is the obvious solution to the abolition of the Oath. I can think of it as only a lesser irritant.

The proper, if not obvious solution, as I believe I tried to point out some years ago to an N.S.S. Conference, is to cut out both Oath and Affirmation, leaving the ground quite clear.

Then, if witnesses have to be reminded that perjury is a criminal offence, such reminder or other instructions from the Court, should be conveyed through the Clerks of the Court; much in the same way that an auctioneer tells the conditions of sale before accepting bids.

Bradlaugh's alternative to the Oath was a tremendous forward stride. The abolition of Oath and Affirmation would be a greater triumph, not to be accomplished in this land of compromise, perhaps, without some other footling ceremony taking their place.

In offering to provide one, Mr. Corina, I think, spoils an otherwise excellent piece of work.—Yours, etc.,

H. IRVING.

### 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. JOSEPH McCABE: "The New Education."

#### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

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

Cliviger (Lancs.).—Wednesday, June 21, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m. Debate: Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. J. REILLY: "Is Spiritualism False?"

Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, June 16, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Hapton.—Thursday, June 22, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Friday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. C. McCALL. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.: Mr. W. A. ATKINSON.

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: A Lecture.

### THE DUKE, DOPE, AND A POND

(Continued from page 227)

the sensitive and imaginative poet, Burns, cried: "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." An observation reflected—more gloomily—by Schopenhauer, who said: "The wise men of all times have always said the same, and the fools—that is, the immense majority—of all times have always done the same—that is to say, the opposite of what the wise have said; and that is why Voltaire tells us that we shall leave this world just as stupid and as bad as we found it when we came here."

Let's pretend we're the *wise* men, eh?

S. GORDON HOGG.

## TENNYSON

BEGINNING inauspiciously as "little Ally" of the rectory, he learnt to versify faster than mos. learn to spell (one would like to read that 6,000-line epic composed at the age of twelve), and at length graduated, bodily and literarily, into giantdom. The ending, in his ninth decade, was all moonlight and Cymbeline, as so well became Baron Tennyson of Aldworth and Farringford, Poet Laureate XII.: "Filled with a nation's praise, Filled with renown"—and filled doubtless with hopeful visions of his "island valley of Avilion"—he left the Victorian Players to an inescapable awareness that the curtain was up on the finale of an era.

A Great Man, of course, despite the reservations (and even at his zenith there were the impious: Butler, not surprisingly, was ribald, while FitzGerald was decidedly sniffy about, of all things, "In Memoriam"). Discounting Her Majesty's earnest esteem, her Prime Ministers (almost) unflagging homage, and her subjects' ever-readiness to dig into their pockets, we find that the defence rests on Tennyson's ear. It is perhaps advisable to add, in view of the fact, that the shapeliness of Tennyson's head provided the main argument in an Ingean defence (the ancillary argument was the soundness of the poet's opinion that revolutions are ungentlemanly), that the reference is not to the material ear. The modern statement found expression in Harold Nicolson, who, in curiously (to use his favourite adverb) Henry Jamesian language, has persuaded us that Tennyson was a superb lyricist environmentally seduced into fancying himself to be the philosopher-poet of his age. Certain it is that over and above the metrical wizardry and the wonderful sharpness of image there is to be found in Tennyson's best work an indefinable "way of putting things" that stops us dead in our reading tracks and occasions that inner creepiness symptomatic of the purest poetry. "The horns of Elfland faintly blowing" and the description of the earth's lying "all Danae to the stars" are only the best known of many instances. And adding to this the pervasive and wholly salutary influence of Tennyson on younger men as far removed from each other as Swinburne and A. E. Housman, one realises something of the man's stature.

Nevertheless, his longer poems almost invariably drag off into tumidity and failure. I think that the two things to point to are Tennyson's unawareness of the twists that certain subjects need for poeticisation and his clumsy handling of what may roughly be called the science-and-life problem. On this basis the "Idylls of the King," with all their anfractuositities, seem to me far less unattractive than, say, the "Princess." The former, considered as a pre-Raphaelisation of full-bodied legendry (the "purity" ideal is so strenuously flogged that one is relieved, although not altogether surprised, to learn that in private life Tennyson was not averse to the bawdy story), are innocuous enough and at worst merely boring. But the "Princess," apart always from the interspersed lyrics, is a hotch-potch of jejune, and sometimes offensive, sociology. "Enoch Arden" is perhaps the low-water mark: there can surely be no parallel to this twopence-halfpenny tale of a sailor, island-stranded for years, who returns home to find his wife married to his friend and who thereupon hides away and dies, after which, the secret out, "when they buried him the little port had seldom seen a costlier funeral." Yet in its day it caused a furore, and the Queen is believed to have consulted Tennyson on its moral implications. All the same, I would not argue with anyone who ranked "Aylmer's Field" below "Enoch Arden." Was there ever a writer to whom feudal class distinctions proved so inspirational a background as to Tennyson? Or, incidentally, ever a poet who collected such awful Christian names for his characters?

As regards science and material progress, Tennyson never quite made up his mind whether he was for or against, and his poetry

suffered accordingly. In approbatory mood, he was usually pedestrian and often naive to the point of childishness—witness the "sport went hand-in-hand with Science" passage in the "Princess"—while the contrary mood was apt to produce ill-humour. The weaving of science into poetry is admittedly a problem that few have solved. Blake, Wordsworth and Keats were untroubled by it, the first two because they firmly rejected the claim of science to humanistic importance and the last because he was serenely indifferent. On the other hand, Shelley welcomed science and poured it into his verse with a felicity that is still unsurpassed. And it is noteworthy that Tennyson said of Shelley that he "lacked common sense."

Among Tennyson's longer poems, "In Memoriam" and "Maud" call for a special consideration. A well-answered call, too; the former, with several interpretative books to its credit, at one time threatened to rival "Hamlet" as a literary mine. "In Memoriam," the most ambitious, intensely personal and lyrically sustained threnody in English, will always win readers—even among those who find its mawkishness painful and its theology paltry. Profuse strains of much-premeditated art maybe, but unmistakably art. "Maud" is a dramatic poem, the word music of which was, at the time of its appearance, something new in prosody. New no longer, it can still stir and make us not over-critical of the dramatic content.

"Art," Banville once said, "is difficulty overcome." A whimsical but not wholly barren concept. The difficulty is so to arrange the paint, the words or the notes that they emotionally "click" in the perceptor's mind. It may be that Tennyson overcame the problem so early and so easily that he forgot that the difficulties re-present themselves every working hour of the artist's life. A Great Man and at the same time a warning against over-solemn dedicatory professionalism in poetry.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

## FREE PRESS MYTH

A SPEAKER at the anniversary meeting of the Newspaper Press Fund said: "Freedom of the Press is more than a public right in time of trouble—it is the very mainspring of a nation's morale." Well! What have we?

In recent times we have seen a daily newspaper suspended for indulgence in freedom, and another cautioned. In the present emergency the Press is tacitly expected to be restrained rather than free in comments on war policy and prosecution, diplomacy and strategy. In other respects also the freedom of the Press is a myth. On religion, for example, it must needs lend support to doctrines known to be scientifically false, and it has to give face to the mysticism and obscurantism that are so serviceable bulwarks to reaction. Again, the recent interview with Marshal Tito (who really represents the Yugoslavian people) by an Associated Press correspondent, was entirely blacked out by the censor. Why?

Strangely, not the speeches of Smuts or Mackenzie King, but that of Mr. Curtin to the Empire Parliamentary Association, was barred from publication. Why?

Truth may be unpalatable to the few, but not so to the many. The function of the public press is to educate and lead public opinion along the lines of plain truth and sincerity.

With few exceptions, newspapers are owned by capitalists whose politics are anti-social, and usually editors have to write along set lines. Nor must newspapers offend the susceptibilities of Tory-Capitalist advertisers from whom so goodly revenue is derived—by being too free with objective Truth. A really free, independent and publicly-controlled Press is the remedy.

A. D. HUNTER.