

# THE FREETHINKER

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## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### God and Us

Said Burns:—

O, wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us,  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,  
And foolish notion;  
What airs in dress and gait wad lea'e us,  
And ev'n devotion.

It took a man of the power of Burns to turn a louse crawling over an overdressed woman's bonnet into material for a valuable lesson. But when I come across the outbursts of some of our modern preachers, I really do long for the power to turn plain speech into a scathing exposure. But if there is any being that sits aloft listening to some of the massed foolishness that comes from our churches, and notes the air and graces assumed by popular preachers, the way in which prominent Church dignitaries present primitive superstitions as worthy of the greatest respect, he must think of Burns, and what good might come from these men seeing themselves as others see them.

Here are two illustrations. The first, a very brief one, provided by the Bishop of Southwell. Through the medium of one of our Sunday papers he informs us that: "People demand that the Church should give a lead"—to social reform, etc. The unwary will naturally picture multitudes of men and women rushing to the Churches to be shown the way in which our social troubles may be ended. But the truth is that it is not the people who are looking to the Churches for guidance; it is the Churches that are trying to solve the problem—by what means the people can be induced to come to them. Never in the whole history of the Christian religion did the Churches stand as low as they do to-day, and never did the preachers of Christianity twist and turn so much to gain the good-will of a public that steadily grows in critical ability. The Freethought movement is reaping the word of its unflinching and uncompromising propaganda.

### God's Defenders

The Bishop of Southwell tries to cheer up his followers by suggesting that the world is waiting hungrily for the Church to take command. There are other preachers who are more daring in their claim, but not more accurate in their reasoning. The Rev. Desmond Morse-Boycott provides in some of the Sunday papers amusement for those who find ordinary reading dull. He opens an article with this:—

Hitler attributes his bomb escape to God's providence.

The Allied world derides. The German world believes.

But the Allied world, if we set Russia on one side, is not justified in laughing at Hitler's "trust in God." Hitler is a Roman Catholic, and he has proclaimed many times that

God selected him for his work of devastation. Moreover, he is not the only leader of the German armies who has proclaimed a firm belief in the Christian religion. Doubtless these will believe that Hitler owes his escape to the Christian God. But Christian or other god, the religious quality of Hitler's mind remains, although Christians appear to forget that their are other than the Christian gods to be reckoned with, and if their names vary, the general qualities of them and their followers remain substantially unchanged. I defy Mr. Morse-Boycott to weaken the evidence for one god unless he weakens the evidence for all. One really should try to be logical in one's reasoning even when it is on the other side. It is not true that untruthful people do not flourish. The world is plentifully sprinkled with all sorts of successful liars—in the Church, in Parliament, in the House of Lords, the Commons, and, of course, in ordinary life. I will also forestall Mr. Morse-Boycott by saying they are to be found among Freethinkers as well as among Christians.

Consider this from our professional preacher. Of Hitler attributing his escape to the help of God, he says:—

Blasphemy it is, because the essence of it is that the Almighty prevented the bomb from killing Hitler so that he could continue to lead the German nation to victory, which would mean the final wiping out of the Jewish race, mass judicial murders on a vast scale, and other things brewed in the cauldron of hell.

Really, we think Mr. Boycott (we will drop the double name) is running past his brief. For, after all, it was God who made hell; Hitler does live to lead his troops, either back to Germany or elsewhere; he is still able to order and encourage more mass murders, and lengthening the war has meant many more thousands of the Allied Forces killed, and a much larger number of men who will be crippled for the rest of their lives. Really, if there is a God I should be more proud of him if he had wiped out Hitler and Himmler while he had so excellent a chance. I am not really blood-thirsty, but I should regard it as something disgraceful if, having the opportunity, I had failed to put an end to these two gentlemen.

If Mr. Boycott has any doubts on these matters I could furnish him with accounts of men and women who have been killed out of hand by God, who have dropped dead or been struck blind because they merely touched the sacred things with which the Church did, and does, its business.

Candidly, I think God fell short of his duty if, having the opportunity of wiping out this cluster of Nazi leaders, he refrained. Nor can I see much difference between killing a man at close quarters and killing him from a distance. In modern war it is a case of "stand not on the manner of your killing, but kill"—so long as the right persons are killed. The chances are that if the leaders of the Hitler gang had been cleared out, the war in Europe might have been ended in a month and hundreds of thousands of useful lives saved.

Mr. Boycott should be made of sterner stuff. He is too careful of affronting the gentle feelings of his readers.

There must be a rather strong vein of humour in Mr. Boycott's make-up, for he says: "It is, of course, conceivable that God might wish Hitler not so much to be saved as saved-up." That, I take it, to mean that God could have settled Hitler, but he preferred to protect him because he was saving him for some striking exhibition of his own power in designing Hitler's punishment. I do not know, but I would venture to say that if this is right, we can only suggest that it would be rather difficult to find another trio who would stand so well together. As an Atheist I should never have dreamed of such things; but then I am not familiar with the ways of God. Mr. Boycott is.

### Providence in Action

Hitler invoked Providence, and candidly, up to a point, the record of Providence runs well in his favour. Fear of Russia led the British Government to play into the hands of Germany. The stronghold of Czechoslovakia, with its powerful armaments, was given to Hitler. He had many friends in high places in this country, and at the last moment the Chancellor of the Exchequer handed over eleven millions in cash to Hitler as a kind of farewell gift. But, says Mr. Boycott, Germany had to wait to attack Russia until France and Britain had been dealt with. So we are invited to see God's interference in delaying the attack on Russia so that it could be better prepared to meet the German attack. That, he says triumphantly, shows what "the Hand outstretched has done for Britain."

May we very gently remind this professional defender of God that his plea is rather weak? If Russia had relied upon God she might have fallen an easy victim to Hitler. But far-sighted leaders in Russia knew that Germany could not be trusted, and that peace with Germany meant transformation into a vassal State. Hitler played many delaying moves, but the Russian leaders were his masters in that kind of game. And it is also worth remembering that we—the people of this country—might have been easily better informed of the state of Russia had not Hitler's official representatives in Britain done their best to mislead the British public.

That is but one side of the matter. Stalin played his cards well with Germany, for the new Russia had spent many years in creating better social conditions than the people of Russia had ever known. But the new Russia was comparatively weak in the matter of munitions of all kinds, and it was fortunate for both sides that this country was able to help. It was self-interest on both sides that Russia became an ally. Of course, the religious and Conservative diehards stressed the idea that our alliance with Russia was for the duration only. Ultimately, concord with "Atheist" Russia was established, and most decent-minded people hope that the alliance will continue in peace as in war. So the influence of God on the right side is not quite so obvious as Mr. Boycott assumes. In any case, the picture of God sitting up aloft, watching his children slaughtering each other, is not a very delightful one. Helping us to get out of a hole is no adequate apology for letting us get into one.

We see this quite clearly when Mr. Boycott brings forward the Dunkirk disaster. It is, by the way, worth noting that the "Hand outstretched," with its implication of adequate help, now becomes the "helping hand," and suggests no more than a little assistance. But, in any case,

Dunkirk was a disaster, and if the Germans had pressed their advantage it might well have been, so far as we are concerned, a fatal one. The work of the men who came to the rescue of the troops should never be forgotten. But Mr. Boycott might ask some of the observers what they think of the help given by God. They knew it was a calamity, and very nearly a fatal one. That we were strong enough to face the disaster—and surmount it—is to our credit, but where does God come in? Our losses were very heavy indeed in men and munitions. The men, soldiers and civilians, played a great part. Gods were unseen.

It may be cruel to remind our preacher that God—if he does anything—is still playing fast and loose with our armed forces. The "hand outstretched" and the "helping hand," if we still assume that they do anything, are there, and they are as erratic and as irresponsible as ever. Consider this. When the invasion of Normandy was determined on, one factor determining it was the probability of fine weather. The King asked, or someone asked for the King, that there should be constant prayers, and in order to give God as little chance as possible of avoiding his obligations, the prayers were to be continuous. The air was as alive with prayers as it is with shells when a full-dress bombardment is taking place. God simply could not plead that he did not know this 24-day bombardment of heaven was taking place.

What happened? If our air attack was to be of value a clear sky was indispensable. But hardly ever have the skies been so clouded. Day after day the planes were rooted to the ground. God appeared to mistake the origin of the prayers. He must have thought the requests for help came from Germany, but in these days gods cannot be over-particular whose prayers they listen to.

Mr. Boycott says of the Dunkirk scene: "The hushing of the sea to sleep so that the vast fleet of nondescript little boats could 'make it' was due to Providence." We prefer to attribute the saving of *part* of our troops to the courage of the men who went out to see what help they could give. "Divine interference" was too late. It always is late, and it is always camouflaged as unmistakably human work. Mr. Desmond Morse-Boycott must try again, and give us something that is more plausible. Even from the preacher's point of view, man would do the job if he could. We are told God could if he would. The days now are not for slackers.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### "I WISH TO AFFIRM!"

WHEN I dropped a little stone into the for some time stagnant pond of the oaths and affirmations question—in a recent article entitled "I Swear by Almighty God"—I hardly expected to raise up points of controversy more germane to theology than to everyday experience.

It is one of the minor tragedies of Freethought work that we sometimes blur our vision in matters of policy by allowing a straight issue to become a twisted wrangle, disputing among ourselves until co-ordinated effort against the common enemy is hampered, if not prevented. Let me try to bring Freethinkers back to what really matters in connection with oaths and affirmations.

Whether or not it is valid for a Christian to take an oath is no concern of ours. Let Christians settle that among themselves—if they ever can settle anything among themselves. Our chief concern should be that we, as non-Christians, are faced with difficulties on certain occasions by being required either

(1) to take an oath which implies an acceptance of religious ideas we do not hold or (2) to distinguish ourselves, and possibly injure our interests, by affirming.

My proposal was quite simple: that we should endeavour to avoid such harmful distinguishing of ourselves by ridding official declarations of their religious formula, leaving a simple civil declaration to which no distinction of outlook can be attached. To reply that the affirmation is as useless as the oath simply begs the question, and to drag in theological aspects which have no bearing on the point confuses the issue as I desired to raise it. Theological wrangling wearies all but the most patient, owing to the insipid bunkum that clutters such questions; and in the case at issue such wrangles have nothing to do with the points involved. Equally, to say that the affirmation is as bad as the oath also raises extraneous points and drags in an issue which is not strictly a Freethought question, but rather a psychological one.

Much store was put upon "facts" by one contributor on this question, so I propose to follow his example. Let us take the facts of the present oaths situation.

Fact 1 is that formal declarations are part of the social and legal system of the country.

Fact 2 is that a religious aspect accompanies many of these declarations.

Fact 3 is that there is an alternative, the affirmation, which cuts out the religious formula.

Fact 4 (this is established) is that people who use the alternative may be placed at a disadvantage.

Bearing these facts in mind, let us first dispose of the theological quibble. Whether or not an oath is religiously valid doesn't matter a rap. Christians can argue this point from now until hell freezes, but it will remain a religious quibble only because the law already provides relief (!) for those who, religiously or otherwise, object to taking an oath. Not a hundred Matthews, nor 39,000 Articles, could make any difference to the position to-day, and sensible Freethinkers will not allow them to do so.

Examining Fact 1, we find that declarations are rooted not in the religious system of the country, but in its social system. Christianity is but a recent imposition on such declarations, which, in essence, existed in the earliest organised societies of mankind. A superficial acquaintance with anthropology, and the social customs of man, will show this to be the case. To abolish, together with the oath, the custom of making formal declarations would mean that we should strike a blow not merely at a religious imposition, but at a custom which originated in the social needs of organised mankind. And that is a rather different proposition; firstly because such customs may contain within them qualities of a distinctly social value, even to-day, and secondly because it is not quite the province of Freethinkers, as such, to tear up non-religious social institutions, especially where something of value may be lost by so doing.

Examining Fact 2, we find that the religious aspect of formal declarations crept in only where Christianity had sufficient influence to impose itself upon the existing custom. Fact 3 shows a recent and progressive step (barely 60 years old) towards diminishing the grip of Christianity on this social custom. Indeed, Bradlaugh's Act was almost a mutation in sociological development, causing an abrupt deviation which partly dislodged the parasitic Christian growth. But Fact 4 shows that parasites, even if dislodged, may pollute the surroundings so badly that their effect may be felt in another way.

So what! Are we to destroy the whole body of a useful social custom to remove the Christian parasitic growth? How our Christian friends would whoop their war-cry, "Destructive

Atheism," if we tried to uproot this valuable custom by abolishing all forms of declaration. Follow the idea logically and see to where it leads. If a verbal undertaking between a man and his fellows is to be scorned as useless and foolish, then so must every written undertaking, every agreement, contract, or stipulation in writing, or every form of written tie that binds man in fulfilment of his obligations to his fellows.

To trust men to tell the truth for truth's sake may sound grand in the peace and quiet of the schoolroom, where we strive to impart to our children a higher morality than our own. But who views the cold world outside through spectacles so rose-tinted as to think that man is already able to honour his obligations to society without a bond to which he may be held? "My word is my bond" is a fine phrase, but too often it carries the mental reservation, "—if it has to be!" And in order to ensure that "it has to be" society must insist upon a pledge which can be redeemed by lawful measures.

But perhaps an even more important reason is that, if we are to have any personal liberty, such redemption by society should be obtainable *only* upon the strength of a special declaration. To put into the hands of any legal or governing power the weapon of prosecuting the individual (slander, etc., excluded) upon his mere spoken word, as distinct from his formal pledge, would open wide the door to the vilest persecutions and restriction of activities. Time was, remember, when the word of an Atheist did not count at all, even upon his pledge; and in a world still greatly under Christian influence, where would the Freethinker stand to-day if Christians were "put upon their honour"?

Two other points.

It serves no purpose to illustrate some of the evil pledges, and stupid pledges, that may be made by our rulers and others upon their oaths of office. The content of a pledge, however evil or stupid, in no way invalidates the value of the custom of pledging. We all know how the useful knife may be put to evil use; but the evil lies not in the knife, but in the user.

The next point concerns the word "truth" as used in oaths and affirmations. Even the most dull-witted judiciary does not regard truth in a court of law as something fixed and positive, which must be manifest in every statement by every witness in a case. In the sense in which the word is used in courts, and is clearly understood, it means a correct account as the witness saw something; it means an honest statement, as distinct from a lying or a deceitful statement. I deny that truth means "all inclusive," as has been suggested. A word with such a meaning would be an absurdity in the everyday affairs of life. The truth of a case is as each person honestly and separately sees it; the business of the court (in theory, at least) is to interpret the truth as the community, via its laws, and as distinct from the witnesses, who are *ex-parte*, would be expected to see the case.

That position seems simple enough to me, and I have no objection in such circumstances to making a promise "to speak the truth," for I feel, with Shakespeare—

"'Tis not the many oaths that make the truth,

But the plain single vow, that is vow'd true."

So, with all respect to more learned and profound Freethinkers, whose philosophic finesse may sometimes lead them away from rough reality, I plead with all plain, hard-boiled Atheists to keep their feet firmly on the ground. Our task is to smash the stranglehold of superstition, in this particular instance by wiping out the obnoxious oath. But in so doing we must not open the doors of society to a tyranny that could become worse than the Inquisition itself. Again to quote, I ask with Lamartine, "Devoid of freedom, what would virtue be?"

F. J. CORINA.

## ACID DROPS

IT is reported that the "Holy House of Nazareth" has been damaged by German raids on Loreto. The "Holy House" is the cottage in which "Our Lady" was born and in which she received the angel's visit to be told all about Jesus. The "house" is a small cottage about 13ft. by 31ft. The house has a wandering kind of a history. While the house was in the possession of Christians it behaved itself as an ordinary building. Then the Saracens took possession, and in a single night the cottage was transported, on May 10, 1291 (we must be exact in these matters), to Fiume by angels. The house, during its passage, was newly decorated. But after about three years residence, behaving as a decent house should, it was, on December 10, 1294, translated to Loreto. And now, one presumes, while the guardian angel was off duty and God was busy helping the Allies, the Germans destroyed the birthplace of Jesus. The genuineness of the hotse was guaranteed by a number of Popes. But none disowned it. After all, even God cannot be everywhere at once.

It will be remembered that the late Cardinal Hinsley initiated the carrying of a special cross by soldiers. They were sold at threepence each. There does not appear to have been any less fatalities among the fighting men who carried the cross than among those who preferred a packet of cigarettes. But now it is said that some irreverent scoundrels have been making and selling the crosses that have not been blessed by the Cardinal. And they seem to be quite as efficacious, although the Church can hardly claim credit for the results. But, worst of all, is the fact that the angels may be treating the forgeries as though they were the real thing. And what will the Heavenly Chief do in the face of such a situation? Will he sack some of his angels?

A writer in the Church of England paper, "Record," remarks that: "Alone among institutions the Christian Church has consistently resisted Nazi teaching and influence." That gives us a hint of the way history will be written by the Churches when the war is over. But to all this flap-doodle stands the solid fact that, if the Churches had dealt honestly with the Russian Revolution, instead of saturating the people with deliberate lies and misunderstanding concerning the aim and quality of the Russian Revolution, and had not so much covert help been given to Hitler in the hope that Germany would serve as a barrier to the understanding, that revolution might never have occurred. And one might suggest that the part played by Christian Nazi Spain, and the Roman Church, also made their contribution in the hope that Russian ideas would be checked, again the war might have been avoided. And the final consideration that without the impetus given to Germany before and right up to Munich, the likelihood is that Nazi Germany would have broken down by its own weight.

The war is approaching its end, and the difficulties that are almost certain to arrive from the return of millions of both sexes to a new world are beginning to take shape. This difficulty will be great with those who range below, say, twenty-five. But the five years of living in an atmosphere saturated with militarism, and its substantial denial of normal civic rights, is bound to seriously react for better and worse. The "haves" will fight hard for a return of their status and privileges, and the "have nots" will fight—we are afraid not so "knowingly" as the "haves"—for some tangible benefits from the new world that is to be. We hope that the plea that followed the last war, "Cannot afford," will not be so powerful at the end of this one.

The Churches have already taken, and won, with the assistance of the Government, the first round. They have been given a measure of control of the schools which is enough to turn reformers in their graves. But they are faced with another situation which they cannot hope easily to overcome. Ever since the war began they have worked hard, and lied lustily, concerning the attitude of the men in the forces towards religion. Thanks to the machinery of the B.B.C., they have trumpeted to the world the gladness with which the fighting fronts have received the Gospel that had been given them by the attendant priests. But the fact they have to face is that the men who return from the war will be more definitely anti-religious than they were when they enlisted. Many old ideas and practices will be weakened

by the war, and no one knows better than the clergy that religion will be one of the hitherto established phases of life that will suffer. They confess that "no stunt services" will restore the health of the Churches, no "family thanksgiving for the return of the Servicemen will suffice." They must, they say, have a real religious survival. They might as well struggle for the return of the Ptolemaic system of astronomy.

It is possible that no other figure did so much to frame the shape of the orthodox Christian Church as St. Paul. He was converted to "Christ" by what looks suspiciously like a sun-stroke, and that is as good a way of finding Jesus as anything. And he was "down" on women. His orders were distinct; they left no room for misunderstanding. Women were to keep silent in the churches. They were to obey their husbands without question. They were even to be shunned to the extent that men should regard celibacy as the ideal state; yet, to avoid something worse, marriage might be permitted. And the Roman Church, and other Churches, have tried to carry out his instructions.

And now the Bishop of Hong-Kong has actually *ordained* a woman deaconess, and to make matters worse Lei Ti Oi is now a priest in the Church of England. This is bad, but worse remains behind, for the Bishop actually chose the feast of the conversion of St. Paul on which to perform the ordination service. No wonder such organs of Christianity as the "Church Times" is very, very angry for this snubbing of St. Paul.

Said the cobbler, "There is nothing like leather." Belonging to the same school of thought is the Bishop of Chelmsford, who makes the very original discovery that only religion—his religion—can "make the world really safe and pleasant to live in." We fancy that all ministers of religion will agree with him, but they will not agree as to *the* religion which is to operate. He also brings forth the following piece of rare wisdom: "The new world will be the world of the boys and girls of to-day." That also is a fine piece of pulpit wisdom; but for it, we might have concluded that the societies of to-morrow will be made up of the old people of yesterday or the day before.

Having thankfully acknowledged the cobbler-like wisdom of the Bishop, very timidly we remind the Bishop that there never has been a time in the history of this country when religion had not a powerful and often a decisive influence in shaping the form of our social life. And the result—a world war that offered a very grave threat to whatever we had developed in the shape of civilisation. The only time that Europe could rest with a moderate degree of peace was when pagan Rome dominated. But from its establishment the Christian Church exerted a pressure strong enough to bring the rulers and people under its influence. Of course, it would be foolish to count the Church as the only factor that need be considered, but it is quite clear that Europe was most Christian when it was warlike.

From Sydney, Australia, comes the news that Rudolph and Winifred Seesink have fallen into serious trouble for taking the clearest of New Testament teaching too literally. It appears that their daughter died from an attack of pneumonia. They were charged with manslaughter because they refused to call in a doctor. Their reason was that they followed New Testament teaching. They were members of the Restored Apostolic Church, and relied entirely on faith.

In a Christian country where honesty prevailed, Mr. and Mrs. Seesink would have been hailed as examples of faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ and of the New Testament. But the Judge, being an up-to-date Christian, called the pastor an humbug and a hypocrite, and sentenced the parents to two years imprisonment. We are of opinion that the language of the Judge was unwarranted, and the sentence unmerited—from a Christian point of view. For, first, Jesus recognised no other cures for disease than sheer magic; he told his disciples that they might encounter deadly things and they should not harm them, and the New Testament says distinctly that when any be sick they should call in the elders of the Church and let the matter rest there. The humbugs and hypocrites are really those who refuse to carry out the plainest teaching of real Christianity.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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### TO CORRESPONDENTS

- F. BEAN.—We should like to see more letters from Freethinkers in the general Press. We expect there would be more were it not for the fact that newspaper editors seem unaware that many of the guns used by the Churches are dummies.
- J. F.—Next week.
- D. SMITH.—We congratulate all concerned that the bigots were so thoroughly beaten in their attempts to prevent Sunday cinemas. It should encourage other centres.
- P. BALL.—Sorry cannot print this week, but will appear.

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

*When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, E. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.*

*THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.*

*Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.*

### SUGAR PLUMS

ALL readers and friends in the district will, we hope, do their best to attend the "Brains Trust" organised by the Keighley Branch N.S.S. at the Co-operative Assembly Rooms, Adelaide Street, Keighley, on August 20, at 2.30 p.m. There will be two teams, consisting of the Rev. F. Harwood (Vicar of Oakworth), the Rev. G. Holmes (Baptist Minister of Oxenhope) and Alderman W. J. Johns of Oakworth (Wesleyan Methodist Preacher and member of the West Riding County Council). These will represent religion. The Freethought case will be in the capable hands of Messrs. F. J. Corina, H. Day and H. Stewart-Wishart. The Question-Master will be Councillor R. Bentley of Bingley. With two such teams we are certain a most interesting afternoon will result, and we trust there will be a "full house" and an enthusiastic audience.

The Rev. S. A. Barrett, in a letter to the "Church Times," has this much to say concerning the "Reformation" in England: "Four hundred years ago a gang of unprincipled looters, aided by German mercenaries and a hundred years of Tyburn, robbed England of the Faith." That is the way in which was addressed King Henry VIII, who earned the title of "Defender of the Faith," a title borne by our present King, who must be a member of the English Church under forfeiture of the throne. The Rev. Barrett wants the English Church to proclaim its faith, and insists that Anglo-Catholics must reveal their faith and re-establish the true faith in this country.

Usually when rogues fall out honest men hear the truth, but not in this instance. We are not defending either Henry VIII or his nobility, or the way in which the people were robbed by Protestants. But it is only fair to say that for the people it was mainly a change of robbers. The Crown took from the Church much of what the Church had taken from the people, and it—Roman or English—allowed nothing to stand between them and their greed. Those who wish to see reliable, documented accounts of the way in which the Church took their dues under all sorts of conditions should consult the three large volumes of

"Five Centuries of Religion," by Professor G. G. Coulton. It is true to say that the Churches under Henry VIII were robbed, but for the people it was just an exchange of one set of robbers for another set.

The new Education Act provides—when circumstances permit—for a lengthening of the school-leaving age, and *promises* many other advantages—again when opportunities permit. Meanwhile the clergy are to be given the power materially to influence the kind of teachers who are appointed, and we may count with absolute certainty that this will materially lower the quality of the education. In actual fact, we shall have more *instruction* and less *education*. It is well to mark the difference in the implications of these terms. Our very generous—rashly democratic—Government now goes a step further. It promises that there shall be admission to the public schools of a number of "common" people up to one-third of their capacity. Oh, wise, and artful, law-givers!

For consider. The public schools furnish a marked proportion of men in the higher branches of the Civil Services. Generation after generation we see men of the quality appointed to Ministerial posts, or to other branches of the Civil Services. And once in the Services, Parliamentary or otherwise, they remain. They may bungle in office after office, they remain in office after office, but they stay in the public service. These posts are, in fact, regarded as the rightful belongings of the outcome of the public schools. But our Government is not only—we rely upon their own description—liberal; it is democratic. We are fighting for the equality of all citizens, and to secure that the best men and women should have an opportunity of serving the State—and themselves.

Now there is no serious complaint against the public schools, as schools. Equally with other schools, they cover philosophers and fools. But, and until, we alter our methods and make the road to distinction open to all, we shall never get the best that can be got out of our people. The only safe rule, the only just rule, is that when we get beyond the elementary schools, the entrance to public schools and to other higher educational institutions shall be by ability only. But that will not come to pass until the British public are less easily fooled than is the case at present.

In England the Government has arranged to replace the clergy in the schools. In Ontario, at least one clergyman is protesting against the Government following the example set by our Tory Government. He says that: "God has committed to the Church administration of spiritual things, and to the State administration of temporal things." We leave the matter where it is, although our Government should explain, confidentially, that the Church will have greater control in the schools than it has had for more than seventy years.

The Dean of Canterbury has roused the ire of the "Church Times" for suggesting that there is an undercurrent of ill-feeling against Russia amongst certain powerful groups in this country. We are afraid that he must expect rough treatment if he lets loose the truth in this matter. Have we quite forgotten the Roman Catholic-Polish attitude in this country towards the Jews? And are there many Christian leaders in this country who have had the courage publicly to confess that the raging of nearly twenty years' attack on Soviet Russia met with the most highly placed support. Even after Russia had joined us in this life-and-death struggle with Germany, there were for some time explanations that Russia was not an ally; she was only with us in fighting a common enemy.

If Russian influence plays a great part in the re-established Poland, we can safely count on mischief from the Roman Church. Poland is one of the strongholds of Catholicism, and as it is certain that closer contact with Russia will create many friends and give Roman Catholicism a bit of a shaking, the Vatican will do what it can to create trouble. Fascism in Poland never upset the Church more than it did in Italy. But Russia! That is a very different thing.

## THE RATIONALISTIC SPIRIT AND ACTION

## II

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways."

—Tennyson, "Morte d'Arthur."

THE religious schism known as the Reformation, which broke the theocratic unity of Christendom, was coincident with other factors making for change and fresh orientations of thought and action. Money economy, where services are rewarded in cash, was superseding natural economy where these are met by corresponding labour and kind. This followed from the expansion of commerce by the geographical discoveries and explorations, the circumnavigation of the globe that revealed for the first time to Western cognisance its real extent, its manifold variety of peoples, their cultures and natural resources. The new trade routes stimulated at once enterprise and cupidity, offering opportunity for acquiring luxury products, natural and manufactured, from countries more advanced in some industrial arts than obtained in the West, so gratifying widened tastes and desires. The rising nations of Europe were becoming defined in their boundaries, language, forms of government, interests and policies. National statecraft took on fresh bearings and alignments, with politics directed more largely to secular ends and increased opulence. A corresponding type of politician comes into prominence, while ecclesiastical concerns and their exponents recede into the background; and Civil Law takes the first place in the jurisprudence of the more advanced nations, developing with the growing complexity of matters with which it has to deal.

"In the 16th century the ideal of nationality, of political unity and independence, began to take the prominent place in men's thoughts and feelings which it has since preserved; and we can trace the curiously late appearance in the English language of what we may call 'patriotic' terms. 'Nation' was an early word, but it was used more with the notion of different races than that of national unity, and was, indeed, commonly employed to describe any kind or class of persons. It gained its present meaning in the 16th century, and late in that century we find the adjective 'national' formed from it. And we can note, at about the same date, the appearance of such terms as 'fellow-countryman' and 'mother country.' 'Fatherland' and 'compatriot' appear a little later, and 'patriot' and 'patriotic' belong to the middle of the 17th century, but did not acquire their present meaning until a hundred years later, at which time 'patriotism' is found. 'Public' in the sense of 'public-spirited' belongs to the early 17th century, but 'public spirit' and 'public-spirited' are somewhat later. . . . Note, too, in the 16th century the beginning of our modern political vocabulary; 'political' itself belongs to this period, and 'politics' and 'politician' (in the older and more dignified meaning of statesman) and 'Secretary of State,' and the adjective 'parliamentary.' This vocabulary was largely increased with the growth of political institutions in the 17th century. The words 'politician' and 'minister' began to acquire their present meaning in its earlier years, and 'legislator' was borrowed from the Latin in the same period. 'Cabinet Council' was apparently introduced at the accession of Charles I in 1625, and we hear of 'the Cabinet' about 20 years later. 'Privy Councillor' and 'Cabal' belong to the period of the Civil War and Commonwealth; and the phrase 'the Army' came gradually into use with the formation of a standing army at this time, and was first applied to the Parliamentary forces in 1647. We can trace, too, at this period the first

beginnings of the vocabulary of Western Democracy. 'Populace' was indeed borrowed in the 16th century from the Italian *popolaccio*, but, like other Italian terms ending in *accio*, it was a term of abuse, and was used in England as an equivalent for 'mob' or 'rabble'; and the adjective 'popular' had something of the same deprecatory meaning. 'The people,' however, in its modern sense appears during the Civil War, when Parliament made a solemn declaration that 'the people are, under God, the original of all just power.' . . ."

These transitions mark a stage, particularly, in the advance of our own country towards "modernism" (which dates broadly from the period above noted), and where representative institutions were then in being as a part of the Constitution. A further distinctive feature of the movement is the progress of science, or "natural knowledge," which brought with it the sense of causal sequence and natural law in the Cosmic order, as against old theories of supernatural intervention, miracles and the like. Though subject to arbitrary interference where theocratic absolutism still prevailed, it was pursued freely in the more emancipated countries, issuing in the vast body of data we possess to-day; while Cosmos itself, through improved instruments of observation, became revealed in all its infinite mystery.†

So there emerges the play of reason and discussion, of what is termed 'public opinion' in the conduct of affairs, as these assume a wider complexity, and corresponding agencies for giving it expression. But, as against this course of illumination, surviving elements of the old régime present an unyielding front of hostility and obstruction. Thus our modern world exhibits a number of antinomies and conflicting trends, as it obtained prior to the *bouleversement* of to-day. Then while freedom of thought and experiment extends into the mundane sphere, popular prejudice and prepossession, even where theocratic authority is non-existent, militate against complete liberty of investigation into Cosmic and religious interests and beliefs.‡ Locke, while pleading for toleration, does not extend his charity to "Atheists." For "the taking away of God leadeth to the taking away of all. . . ." The final triumph of Liberty pertains to these interests.

Amid this anarchy, there has come through its bold pioneers the factor which we may distinguish as the Rationalistic Spirit and Dynamic. It takes all knowledge for its kingdom. In the light of that knowledge and its advancement, it seeks to explore Cosmic problems and concerns to the sole end of the discovery of Truth, detached from all prepossessions whatsoever. In the mundane sphere it approaches the question of human well-being with the aim of bringing scientific resources to the task of amelioration and betterment, and to give a clear, defined direction to the path of ascendant Life. For the very belief in possibilities of betterment and progress is, too, a modern attainment.

And here we touch not simply material issues and proposals, but reach out to an act of Faith, doctrine and inspiration in the pursuit of this ideal. . . . Its fundamentals may perhaps be indicated by giving a positive meaning to certain negative affirmations from the theocratic citadel.

The famous Vatican decrees of last century condemn, among a number of heresies, "that most pernicious and insane opinion that liberty of conscience and of worship is the right of every man, and that this right ought, in every well-governed State.

\* L. Pearsall Smith: "The English Language."

† A work in which the Royal Society of London (1663) has taken a leading part.

‡ In a story of Ingersoll, a friend was admiring a fine edition of Voltaire in his library, and inquired as to its cost. "Well," said he, "I believe it cost me the Governorship of Illinois."

to be proclaimed and asserted by law. . . . That the will of the people, manifested by public opinion (as it is called), should constitute a supreme law. . . ." And, "Let him be anathema who shall say that man can and ought, of his own efforts, by means of constant progress, arrive at last at the possession of all truth and goodness!"

We must next examine the terrain of this emprise.

AUSTEN VERNEY.

### SO NOW THE BELGIANS KNOW— AND WE, TOO!

FOR the umpteenth time that small nation, Belgium, with a population only as large as that of London, has become a battlefield. As usual, not responsible for the wars fought between her great neighbours—but always the victim.

At least, this is what the Belgians—or I, who lived so long among them—might have thought. But, no! Instead of being innocent victims, they are bad, bad men. For . . .

" . . . The tragic events which we are experiencing are destined to make you into better men. . . ."

This, friends, is the conclusion of Cardinal Van Roey, Primate of Belgium, Archbishop of Malines (or Mechlin). He said this in his Pastoral Letter of May 15, 1944, read in all the churches on May 21, and in which he protested against the air raids on Belgium.

But that is not all. Immediately after the above assertion, he continues:—

" . . . This is indisputably God's almighty purpose in allowing them to take place. . . ."

So now they know—and so do we!

Of course, the shepherd in him had also a word to say. He continued:—

"May these happenings detach your minds from the vanities and trifles of this world by compelling you to consider the essential interests of your soul and your salvation."

Really, in the trying times that our Belgian Allies are going through, I would have thought that the Cardinal would have had something more heartening and practical to say to that martyred nation; but the rest of his letter did not reveal anything of importance.

And I wonder what the Lord must think of the "heartiness" of Cardinal Van Roey. YOUNG MENATA MOE.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### FREETHOUGHT AND THE WAR.

SIR,—I wish to express my complete agreement with Mr. F. J. Wood, and to add my protest to his against the abominable anti-patriotic and anti-democratic propaganda of Mr. O. G. L. Du Cann. Mr. Du Cann's rejoinder in your issue of July 30 only aggravates the offence.

To conjoin Hitler, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in one breath as "political mountebanks"—drawing no distinction between the man who began the war and the men who lead the resistance to him—is an outrage on truth. To insinuate that Mr. Wood or anyone else "worships" these four contesting parties as "God" is an insult to intelligence. And to drag the issue of Freethought into it, as if Freethought meant the liberty of lying, evil-speaking and treason, is a measure of Mr. Du Cann's title to the honourable name of Freethinker.

I have dealt before with Mr. Du Cann's attitude to the war and to Fascism, and have not been answered; so I will content myself here with adding that I believe the admission of such articles as Mr. Du Cann's to the columns of an honoured Freethought journal is prejudicial to the cause we fight for, and calculated to make many friends of the movement turn elsewhere for intellectual stimulation.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

#### CO-OPERATIVE CRITICISM.

SIR,—Mr. G. Bailey (July 30 issue) mildly reproaches me for "mentioning others" but ignoring his own efforts to combat the religious racket in the Co.-op. Centenary. The fact is that I never mentioned any efforts of Freethinkers in this matter. I took them for granted, fully appreciating them, but preferring to draw attention to the danger in the activities of the religious and anti-Co-op. propagandists. Mr. Bailey's own efforts, therefore, and others similar, were silently admired. Certainly there was no question of discrimination against Mr. Bailey, who appears to have done more than most in the matter.

Re the Sugar Plums paragraph, however, it may be true that no power on earth can prevent a committee chairman asking the idiotic question, "Do you go to Sunday school?" when interviewing a boy for a job in a grocery store. But I hope it is equally true that no power on earth can prevent "The Freethinker" criticising such imbecility, or asking sane Co-operators to raise such issues, which contain legitimate points of principle affecting the whole movement.

Courageous criticism, even of Co-operative religious bigotry, should make Mr. Bailey love the lovable "Freethinker" even more, and encourage him in his splendid work for the Best of Causes.—Yours, etc.,

F. J. CORINA.

### 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.

#### 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.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Debate. Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. A. REILLY.

Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, August 11, 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. J. W. BARKER and F. SODEN will lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Friday, August 11, 8 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL: A Lecture. Sunday (Platt Fields), 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will 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.

Oswaldtwistle.—Thursday, August 17, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Todmorden (Market).—Saturday, August 12, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Worsthorne (Lancs.).—Monday, August 14, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

"PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT." By CHAPMAN COHEN. Paper, price 2s., postage 2d.; cloth 3s. 3d., post free.

"WHAT IS RELIGION?" By R. G. INGERSOLL. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

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

## THE ARCHBISHOP AND DIVORCE

NO Freethinker should be allowed to forget the dictum of the Archbishop of Canterbury that the Church has "the right, nay the duty" to criticise social legislation without assuming responsibility either for its initiation or practical application.

The Archbishop and his kind, cashing in on the war with days of prayer and hole-and-corner concessions in the new Education Act, whilst heads are turned in other directions, are gaining new confidence in the exercise of this self-assumed "right or duty."

In a recent issue of the Diocesan Gazette, the Archbishop, fortified by ephemeral success postulates an astounding claim. He says, with regard to divorce, that "the marriage service should never be used where one of the parties to a proposed marriage has a partner to a former marriage still living." This, of course, is true to form, but he goes further—"No doubt there are very hard cases and I wish the Church had courts that could issue decrees of spiritual nullity in some instances especially when the dissolved marriage was that of a minor, but we have no means of granting a nullity on grounds acceptable by the Church, and the State grants it only on narrowly limited grounds. It is quite impossible for the Church to discriminate between the applications which are made. The technically guilty partner is often no more guilty than the other and so forth." His "narrowly limited grounds" by the way, are the results of legislative compromises arrived at through Church and other re-actionary opposition to changes in the law of divorce.

This present desire to interfere with the contract of marriage, recognised as a civil matter for so many years, should be diagnosed immediately as an attempt at a reversion to the state of affairs prevailing before the Matrimonial Causes Act, 1857. Before that time jurisdiction in divorce was confined to the ecclesiastical courts. A Christian marriage was indissoluble; only divorces a mensa et thoro could be granted (equivalent to the modern judicial separation which does not dissolve the marriage). The ecclesiastical attitude that marriages made in heaven could not be unmade by man (even the Archbishop), resulted in such a pretty social mess that popular clamour tore away this exclusive fee-snatching jurisdiction.

The social evil, reluctantly remedied in part by the first of our modern divorce laws, was admirably pointed out by Mr. Justice Maule in a case where a hawker who had been convicted of bigamy, urged in extenuation that his lawful wife had left her home and children to live with another man, that he had never seen her since, and that he married his second wife in consequence of the desertion of the first. The Judge, in passing sentence, said:—

"I will tell you what you ought to have done under the circumstances, and if you say that you did not know, I must tell you that the law conclusively presumes that you did. You should have instructed your attorney to bring an action against the seducer of your wife, for damages. That would have cost you about £100. Having proceeded thus far, you should have employed a proctor, and instituted a suit in the ecclesiastical courts for a divorce a mensa et thoro; that would have cost you about £200 or £300 more. When you had obtained a divorce a mensa et thoro, you had only to obtain a private Act of Parliament for a divorce a vinculo matrimonii. The Bill might possibly have been opposed in all its stages in both Houses of Parliament and altogether these proceedings would have cost you £1,000. You will probably tell me that you never had a tenth of that sum, but that makes no difference. Sitting here as an English Judge it is my duty to tell you that this is not a country in which there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. You will be imprisoned for one day."

The 1857 Act followed upon this caustic judgment.

Now for the Archbishop in the year of grace 1944. Surely the concessions made under Church pressure in all divorce legislation up to and including Mr. A. P. Herbert's Matrimonial Causes Act, 1937, are enough to suffer. But the Archbishop in the interests of self-preservation must needs press his sectarian and mediæval claims.

Let every Freethinker recognise this milk-and-watery "christian socialist" for what he really is, a reactionary menace. But let us too take comfort in that he is not sufficiently cunning to hide his designs from the discerning. "LEX."

## THE MEANING OF "ANARCHISM"

THE ordinary person's idea of an anarchist is a mysterious man in a black cloak who goes about throwing bombs. Just why the throwing of bombs should be regarded as a particularly sinful form of activity in an age when most Governments have been throwing thousands of them it is difficult to understand; but I think that all Freethinkers should have some knowledge of this political philosophy, since it has a definite attraction for all anti-authoritarians. It is against all forms of government control, and against priestly domination. It is fundamentally Atheistic in its outlook.

Except for Mr. Herbert Read's "Poetry and Anarchism," however, the anarchist movement has for long been handicapped by the fact that there have been available very few authoritative statements of the anarchist view of the modern world—and Mr. Read, as a poet and critic of the arts, has presented a rather specialised view of the matter. Now there has appeared a more general treatise which is well worth the half-crown which is charged for it. This is Mr. George Woodcock's "Anarchy or Chaos," just published by the Freedom Press. It gives a straightforward description of the development of anarchist thought through such classical philosophers as Godwin, Bakunin and Kropotkin, and ends with a brief description of the attitude of anarchists to the troubled world of to-day.

Naturally, many readers will disagree with some attitudes which Mr. Woodcock adopts. I myself, for example, do not agree with him in his attitude towards the present war. I hold that while the Tories are fighting the war to keep their ascendancy over the people, yet lovers of freedom can consistently support the war effort; for any kind of Hitlerian tyranny would be far worse than the Tory Government of Winston Churchill. Mr. Woodcock's book, for instance, could not be published in Germany; and I very much doubt whether it could be published in the U.S.S.R. We have lost almost all our freedom in this war. We are regimented and directed and controlled; but we still have retained the right to fight an intellectual fight, and that means that we have a jumping-off ground from which the fight against our own petty tyrants can start at the conclusion of hostilities in Europe.

This one point apart, there is little in the book with which one can find fault. It provides an interesting introduction to a philosophy of politics which is too little known, and, if only for its palpable hits against the priesthood, it should be on the shelves of Freethinkers' libraries. S. H.

**THE BIBLE HANDBOOK.** For Freethinkers and Enquiring Christians. Edited by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Passages cited are under headings: BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS, BIBLE ATROCITIES, BIBLE IMMORALITIES, INDECENCIES AND OBSCENITIES, BIBLE ABSURDITIES, UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES AND BROKEN PROMISES. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.