

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Clergy of To-Day

THERE is an old saying that "good" people reserve the fool of the family for a religious career. Yet, as the world goes, that practice is not a very old one. Roughly, it may be less than a couple of centuries old; but behind that period there existed a time when the Church, while never short of fools, yet managed to keep them in the background in subordinate positions. That period was a very lengthy one. It did not commence with the history of Christianity, because for the first three centuries—accepting theological figures—the infant Church could not boast of any great intellects at all. St. Augustine appears to be the first Christian who could claim to be of marked intellectual ability. Before Augustine we cannot think of a first-class intellect in the service of the Church. With the weakening of the ancient culture, however, there ensued a long period of darkness, with only a fitful glimmer of light here and there. The Church dominated and enforced its rule in a manner worthy of a forerunner of German Nazism. Then came the awakening of Europe, say about the 12th century, against which the Church fought a retreating battle. But until, say, the last quarter of the 17th century the Churches managed to have in their service leaders of ability and distinction. It was not until the end of the 17th century (these dates are rough calculations) that the quality of Christian preachers began to sink at an ever-increasing rate. The rapid development of evolutionary theories gave the Christian Churches a blow the effects of which have been cumulative until the quality of Church representatives, and an increasing readiness to clutch at anything that promised temporary safety, were enough to secure the pity of even its enemies. Now we are approaching the stage in which not even the fools of the family are willing to fill the breach in religion that has been made by modern thought.

When the war began there were signs that the clergy in this country hoped to make something profitable out of it. Generally speaking, times of distress have often helped the Churches. This was not because it affected those who had made up their minds concerning the gods, but because those who had been dilatory in the religious services in which they believed were roused to action. A rush of days of prayer was tried, but in most cases calamities followed in the place of expected good things. Probably with the intention of encouraging others, several Church leaders have announced that a number of young officers had expressed the desire to take "holy orders"—when the war was over. No names were given and no numbers were named; but even if it were true the gains in that direction would be heavily counter-balanced by the

number of both officers and men that managed to get rid of whatever religion they possessed. And now even the Roman Church is confessing that the outlook of getting hold of the younger generation of the French people, at least, is very slim. Certainly, whatever nascent religious feeling has been quickened by seeing millions of the images of God killing each other, and adding the quite unreliable hail-fellow-well-met type of padre and their reports of men who are influenced by them, it is unlikely the Church will make good the losses already incurred. When it comes to advertising religion, the Churches have never been short of a Goebbels.

The Religious Outlook

Meanwhile religious leaders are straining credulity to breaking-point by their stories of the increase of religion among the troops, and obviously in the hope that it will have a profitable action among civilians. But there are those who are driven to be more candid. Thus, Canon Brown of Dewsbury mournfully says in the "Yorkshire Observer," "The outlook for organised religion is not very promising. Two world wars have shattered the faith of multitudes and Agnosticism is widespread." What will the travelling padres say to this? They will probably feel that, after having lied so lustily, they deserve better treatment. But the shrinking of religion is undeniable. The shock of broken homes, with churches offering no greater protection than public-houses, has forced reflection, and a God who can do so little in protecting them can hardly expect to be looked to for help concerning mundane matters. The sight of clergymen hastening to remove church fittings of value is not encouraging to the godly.

But the loss of believers did not commence with even the war of 1914. And if the present war has outdone others in its ferocity, it may be pointed out that war is always war. The number of those killed gives no guide to the ferocity of warfare. The important point here is that our Churches raised no serious protests against war so long as it could be fought in a comfortable manner and did not cost too much. Far from opposing war, the Church has always been ready to bless it. Our Churches have always been lavish with their monuments to well-known soldiers. For one man of scientific ability who deserved the praise of his fellows there are two or three effigies of successful soldiers. In fact, the Army was always a place which provided the opportunity for distinction. It was Winnington-Ingram, the then Bishop of London, who described the war of 1914 as "God's opportunity"; and in this war God's opportunity appears to have expressed itself in sending us inconvenient weather when our Forces wanted clear skies. The ancient Romans could maintain the peace of the world from Babylon to Scotland with an armed force of a few hundred thousand men; and its boundaries were threatened in all directions by barbarians.

To-day the barbarians are within our gates, not without. But the Roman peace was a real thing. The present war shows what the Christian peace is worth.

Nor should we lose sight of the fact that in all our wars there has been the solid body of the principal Churches behind the war. What the Christian Church did, in fact, was not to condemn war but to sanctify it. To-day we launch a warship with solemn religious proceedings. The merchant ship must get along without being blessed by God. He cannot take cognisance of trifles.

In that very charming book, "The Soul of a People," H. Fielding, who, as a Government official, spent many years in Burma, a country of Buddhists, describes the reaction to the British war against them. The men went to their priests and said: "You have told us we may not take life, and if we do we must pay the penalty; but now we are told that it is our duty to go to war. What must we do?" And the priests replied that they could not alter the moral law and he who takes life must pay the penalty. Each man must do what he thinks is best. If he must defend his country, still he must pay the price for taking life. Every man must decide for himself what he must do.

Would the Christian priest have replied in so wise a manner? Or would he not have turned to a part of his "sacred" book and found a passage that glorified the soldier? The Buddhists may have taken part in a war, but there is no such thing as a Buddhist war. The history of nearly 2,000 Christian years is full of war. And the Christian priests have praised them, sanctified them, and have studded the churches with monuments to those who fought—that is, if they were people of social consequence. And do not let us forget that it is not the fact of how many are slain—it is the same thing in essence whether one is killed by a bow and arrow or an aeroplane.

Even in writing his moan over the loss of patrons—or dupes—Canon Brown can be open-minded. He says "Agnosticism is widespread." That, I think, expresses no more than a desire to hide the extent of the religious losses. Why Agnosticism? That was never more than an escape device to delay the fact of Atheism. Agnosticism leaves the road open for a God. Atheism, taking its stand on modern anthropology, says we know what "God" means. We know how men came to believe in the existence of gods, of the part they played in human history; and the knowledge of how the gods were born is the surest guarantee of their ultimate disappearance. Gods are historic facts, as witches are historic facts. Gods live just so long as people believe in them. It is then left for Atheistic men and women to think of them with interest. Their own followers are too ready to treat them with contempt.

We note that Canon Brown tries to cheer up the weaker believers by assuring them that the Church leaders are planning to build a new world as soon as they can. That seems a polite warning that irrespective of what science knows to-day of the origin of the belief in gods, yet if people will only continue to believe in them as solid realities the clergy will maintain the imposture of religion.

Anything rather than confess the truth about religion. Naturally, because religion has become one of the greatest impostures of the day. We note, for example, that a series of conferences is to consider "how to improve the

standard of preaching in the English Church." But it is not inferior oratory that is keeping the churches empty. It is the growing disbelief in fundamental Christian doctrines that is the source of the trouble. The forms of oratory change from period to period, whether the subject be religion, politics or anything else. The oratory of Gladstone would not to-day arouse the praise of his listeners. Wesley could, in the 18th century, drive weak-minded listeners into a fit; to-day he would raise nothing more than a smile. When Spurgeon could send people grovelling on their knees 70 or 80 years ago for pardon by throwing this at them: "There is hope for the vilest through the precious blood of Jesus. . . . You sinners shall have no back seats in heaven. You shall have as much joy as the brightest of saints. You shall sit with Christ on the throne. Fifty years of iniquity shall be wiped away, and it shall not take thirty minutes to do it," would to-day rouse nothing but disgust. Oratory is a very powerful implement, but it changes in form as does the language we use.

The Rev. E. L. Macassey writes in the "Evening Standard" that "the Church is waiting for leaders who can fan into flame the spiritual embers of our Church." We can agree with that—the Church is waiting for a revival. Well, that is possible but not very probable. Those who think otherwise should remember that after ancient Athens and Rome there came the Christian Church. And who will argue—or who can argue with success—that the Church was an advance on these two earlier cultures? The reply to any such assertion lies in the fact that it was the recovery of the ancient Greek world which led to what is known in history as the "New Birth." The intermediate period between the rise of Christianity and the Renaissance came as near blank as any system could. And whatever improvement, from the humanitarian standpoint, has taken place is due to the extent to which human values have been taken as a measure in place of essential Christian doctrines.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE SPIRIT OF VULGARITY

I OUGHT to be ashamed. I have disgraced myself by being needlessly vulgar and dishonoured the columns of "The Freethinker" by writing with gratuitous offensiveness. Moreover (I may as well pile it all on), I am pathetically ignorant of Spiritualism, and I ceased to be reasonable and became irrational when I wrote on that subject recently.

In short, a writer in "Psychic News" declares that "The Freethinker" added no laurel to its brow by publishing a foolish article attacking Spiritualism. "We admire that journal for its forthright stand for freedom, its unyielding opposition to clerical bigotry," he says; but "when it comes to Spiritualism 'The Freethinker' ceases to think freely. A whole page was given to an article by F. J. Corina, who used the occasion of the Rev. C. L. Tweedale's spirit return to indulge in needless vulgarity."

I hope you can get the gist of the point. It seems to be that when "The Freethinker" attacks those ideas which are also opposed by Spiritualists they admire our forthright stand for freedom and our unyielding opposition; but those qualities become mere vulgarity and folly when the corns of Spiritualists are trodden on.

In quoting the first paragraph of the offending article ("The Record Resurrection," August 6 issue), "Psychic News" says: ". . . gratuitous offensiveness cannot help Freethought." But I think the real point is that such articles do not help Spiritualism. Perhaps to some people parts, or the whole, of the article may have seemed offensive. To others it was probably just simple fun about a piece of nonsense. It's all a question of the spirit in which you view it, as the writer goes on to show when he says, with a note of injury: "We are Spiritualists because we have proved survival to our own satisfaction."

But I cannot don his cap of offensiveness merely because he has proved survival to his own satisfaction. That is the least important factor. The most important is that he has not proved survival to my satisfaction; and unless he does so his ideas of survival must remain fair targets for either serious criticism or even for ridicule and banter. Other people claim they have proved the existence of God—all sorts of gods—to their own satisfaction; but that does not justify them in asking "Psychic News" to refrain from using any legitimate weapon of opposition against ideas that do not harmonise with Spiritualism. Nor can "Psychic News" legitimately squeal at "The Freethinker," or at myself, merely because they have "satisfied themselves." It is us they have to satisfy in order to modify or silence criticism; and personally I am not prepared to modify even ridicule or sarcasm in cases where I feel such are necessary and effective.

Padded gloves may be invaluable for controversy which aims chiefly at displaying the style and grace of the controversialists, but it seems to me that controversy has a more realistic purpose. To have lasting value it must either knock sense into somebody or knock nonsense out of somebody. Let "Psychic News" produce evidence which will knock sense into me, or ridicule—or even vulgarity—which will knock nonsense out of me, and they will be doing something to establish their case; but until then, on the basis of evidence in my possession concerning survival ideas, I shall continue to knock as much nonsense as I can out of other people in my own way. So much for the principle by which forthrightness may easily become mere vulgarity. Now a brief reference to the subject-matter.

"Psychic News" asks: "What is Corina's competence to write upon this subject? Has he seriously searched, weighed, analysed, reasoned and reflected? No. The most he can say is that for two years as a newspaperman in search of a good story he tried to contact a spirit. No reasonable person would say that searching for a good story is a calm, dispassionate investigation of Spiritualism."

Perhaps it isn't, or perhaps it is. But at least it is just as reasonable a way of looking for spirits as the method of those who search with the idea of finding them. It may be true that the sceptical searcher cannot find them because he does not hope to find them; but it is equally true that the "receptive" searcher can find them because he expects to do so. But it's a poor advertisement for the value or power of the spirits that they cannot pierce a bit of human scepticism, especially in view of their amazing capacity for acrobatically upsetting all known physical laws.

My competence to write on the subject is the competence of any Materialist whose study of life has led him to certain conclusions that do not support the Spiritualist idea of survival. It is hardly a prerequisite of knowledge, say, of a disease that one has to suffer from it. It may be competently studied from the sufferings of others. But apart from this I have certainly examined the claims of Spiritualism at first hand, perhaps rather more deeply than "Psychic News" is aware, and found it wanting. I have also studied it at second hand by noting

its effects upon individuals who practise it, and by observing its general social effects in the community.

As a result, I am led to view the whole business, in round terms, as a mixture of sincere neurotic nonsense and deliberate fraud and humbug, the sum effect of which is to fool thousands of people into a state of submissive expectancy, in which a yearning to contact their loved ones takes their minds away from realities, with the resultant evil social effects—hardly different, in the last analysis, from the mental dope of the more orthodox religions. Worse than this, perhaps, is the untold damage done to private and family lives by so many Spiritualist seers and psychics whose puerile prognostications, especially in the field of alleged sexual infidelity, frequently lead to broken hearts and homes.

"Psychic News" may happily and cheerfully record week by week the alleged wonderful "cures" of spiritual healing, but I get among people where the realities of the dope make themselves manifest. I know that it might be answered that these things are not true Spiritualism—but that is always the answer to the seamy side of any religion.

But we must get on. I want to be vulgar again. "Psychic News," anent my jesting suggestion that I should try to contact some of our own Freethought spirits, reveals the amazing information that Bradlaugh has actually returned.

Fancy that! I can only say that I consider it very shabby of Bradlaugh to return in spirit without giving Freethinkers a first chance to be present at his spiritual debut. After all, it was Freethinkers who stood by him in his times of greatest trial, who found both financial and moral support to back him in his great work, when even Spiritualists looked askance at the arch-Atheist of the Victorian era. Dammit, sir, it isn't cricket to allow us to go on wasting our time opposing ideas of survival when one of the greatest of our kind could put us right in a few minutes by popping up at the N.S.S. Conference—or looking in at "The Freethinker" office.

In concluding, "Psychic News" says: "Freethinkers have still a task to perform in ridding the world of ancient prejudices which dominate too many minds."

I heartily agree; but some of us extend the task to ridding the world of modern prejudices as well as ancient ones. These also dominate too many minds.

F. J. CORINA.

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ACID DROPS

WE are always being reminded that God is powerful, but in some respects Bing Crosby has far greater influence. And he is not the only one. If the King and Queen announced they were going to St. Paul's for a religious service, in that case God and the King would fill the cathedral. Announce that God is the only person of note who will be present, and that he will be unobservable, and there will be many empty seats. People like a show, but "God" really has no show value.

What God fails to do—that is, fill his churches—others are more successful. In the smaller churches a noted boxer, cricketer or actor will help considerably, and we are quite sure that an actual boxing match, say, six rounds, the winner to make a speech of, say, ten minutes duration, would crowd either St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey. In the U.S.A. we see that St. Helen's Catholic Church has not been having very large audiences, although the usual stage fittings were there. So it has arranged that Bing Crosby should sing—twice in the same day—in the church. It was quite a success, and an American paper remarks that people filled the place for the early performance—and then stopped there for the second show. Crowds could not get in, and they had to be content to see Bing leaving. Great is the power of God—when supported by Bing Crosby.

Mr. Eric Newton, an artist critic, we believe, says: "The tradition of religious art has been lost. It disappeared in a mist of worldliness at the end of the seventeenth century." That is a fine mixture of fallacy and misstatement. First, there never was such a thing as religious art, whether we have in mind music, statuary or painting. There were musicians, painters and sculptors who worked for a church, pagan or Christian. But that is a quite different question. A religious man could not avoid lugging in his religion, and the non-religious man who had to live took his wares into the religious market in the absence of any other. Actually, so far as patronage went, it is not difficult to see the spirit of paganism in much that passes for religious work. Finally, when certain writers bemoan the loss of religious art, they are merely registering the fact that they are drawing attention to the decline of religion.

We see that some pious Scottish preachers—left-overs from the sixteenth century—are opposing the gathering-in of the harvest on Sunday. They do not seem to be disturbed by our men (excuse our not saying "boys"; we really believe that most of them are actually men) fighting, killing and dying on Sunday in many parts of the world. Of course, the dead ones when brought before God and charged with killing on Sunday, might well reply: "Well, but you did nothing to prevent the war. If you had paralysed the hand of the German from midnight on Saturday, and kept them so until Monday morning, we need not have killed on Sunday." But we believe talking back is not permitted in heaven. It is run on a completely Fascist plan, with the exception that the chief elects himself.

Lies are hard to kill. Religious lies are indestructible. They have the history of the Churches behind them and the good wishes of their God before them. Here, for example, are two Christian truths that we believed to be dead. "Thomas Paine cried on his death-bed"—the usual place—"O God, help me." Paine was a deist and died one. Voltaire, also a deist, cried again when dying, "I am lost; oh that I had never been born." There are millions of Christians who would wish that Voltaire had never been born. True, the world would be poorer, but the Churches would have had an easier time; so would God.

A little sidelight on the new Education Act. The House of Lords struck out the last four lines of Section 72 (4) under which no minister of any denomination shall be allowed to inspect Agreed Syllabus teaching. The Commons refused to accept this and the clause was inserted in slightly different words. This means that, after all, the usual panel of Anglican and Nonconformist parsons now cannot interfere with the Agreed Syllabus—as they most particularly want to, and as they used to every year. According to one churchman writing to the "Church Times," this makes

things for the Churches much worse, and even the incorporation in the Bill of the Archbishop's five points "will be rendered largely nugatory." Or in other words, everything in the Garden of Education is not so lovely after all—for poisons.

H. S. De Caires, S.J., is good enough to give the world an explanation why Roman Catholics cannot join in prayer with other Christians. He says the reason is that there are so many differing Christian bodies in England holding such "contradictory views on essential points that it is impossible for Catholics to pray with them in public." We sympathise with all concerned. Yet it would be very confusing, even very bad, if the people praying to God for better fortunes turned out to be Protestants when God took them for Catholics, and vice versa. Such a prayer as "Scatter thine enemies" would work out very badly if God has to-day a declining number of worshippers. Humans sometimes complain that the world is very worrying. But God, with a steadily decreasing number of worshippers, and not too sure of certain groups, must feel very bothersome.

The Bishop of Barking writes in the "Star" that "The Church has been crippled seriously by the war." That the Church has been crippled we believe, but the crippling has not been done by the world war. On the contrary, the Church has had a great many advertisements from the war. It has had a number of days of prayer under cover of the war; it has also managed to get an Education Act which, under cover of a few good things, has re-established the clergy in the schools; and we have had a handful of Generals who have explained to the world that God either helped, or was wholly responsible for, the good turn the war has taken. Really, the war has brought many benefits to the Church. And the practice in "tall stories" that the wartime padres have developed should stand them in good service when they return to civil life.

The Bishop says "The war has taken the cream of our younger clergy." That is not the truth—at least there is only a modicum of truth. It is not the war that has taken so many young men from the Church, but the change in the intellectual atmosphere. That change did not begin with the war or with a war. It set in several generations ago when scientific development made it difficult for honest and intelligent men to enter the Church on a life work. The cry that it was becoming more and more difficult to get man to look to the Church as a "career" was heard a good half-century ago, and the jeer that the Church was getting the fool of the family is older still. Really, the Bishop's pleading is so poor that one might quote him as evidence of what we have just said.

There is another sentence of the Bishop which, quite unconsciously, supports what we have said. He says: "A few generations ago many men entered the ministry with no mission and no message, with no love of God and no love of souls, but only with the desire for a passable income, with a comfortable home thrown in." But a few generations ago, the eighteen forties, young men did not feel the direct shock of science on religious origins, to say nothing of the general social influence, as it is felt to-day, and the smug self-satisfaction of the mid-Victorian days was still in force. To-day it is not the war that is responsible for the open declaration against religion, so much as the war has torn from large numbers the mask of religious devotion. The Churches are still powerful for evil, and so far may yet count its victories; but it will find it more and more difficult to claim with success that it holds a place in the world of intelligence and mental honesty.

Dr. Letitia Fairfield, senior medical officer of the L.C.C., told a Roman Catholic gathering the other day that "The way we utilise our chances (in education) in the next few years is just everything for the future of the Catholic Church in England." Well, there is no doubt that the R.C.s are doing their best inside and outside the Houses of Parliament. When two of the leading Ministers of State go out of their way publicly to pay their respects to the Pope of Rome, one may expect some results. And artful as our own Ministers are, they will have to get up very early to outwit the Vatican when it comes to underhand manoeuvring.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. BLAND.—We have had several requests for a reprinting of the article by Professor Duhig. We will bear it in mind, but many things are held up owing to the paper shortage. Years ago the majority of Spiritualists did not believe in God. We fancy that God was introduced as a help to make ghost-hunting popular. Certainly Spiritualism does not in itself affirm a God.

M. FELDMAN.—A branch of the N.S.S. in Leeds, if run properly, should meet with success. There are plenty of Freethinkers in and around Leeds to do the work, and a much larger number of men and women who are sick and tired with all the Churches. If the National Secular Society can help it will do so.

H. HAMMERTON.—We do not think there is any evidence whatever that conduct worsens when men give up belief in God. You may have found, of course, some man who was noted as a blackguard after he gave up God. But we would wager rather heavily that, other things equal, he was a blackguard while he was resting in the arms of Jesus. The probability is that his fellow-worshippers were not perturbed when he behaved as a blackguard and attended church. They were naturally shocked—publicly, when he remained a blackguard without God.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges donations to the Benevolent Fund from the Blackburn Branch N.S.S., 5s.; R. C. Moley, 2s. 6d.

For "THE FREETHINKER."—A. E. Garrison, 3s.; M. Feldman, 20s.

P. NOTES.—Next week; crowded out.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

ON Sunday next (October 15) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Cosmic Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow on "An Hour with the Gods." Doors open at 2 p.m.; the chair will be taken at 2.30 p.m. Donation tickets can be obtained from Collett's Bookshop, 15, Dundas Street, C. 1, and 75, George Street, C. 1.

The uncertain delivery of mail from the United States is responsible for this tardy notice of the death of George E. Macdonald, associated almost the whole of his long life with the New York "Truth Seeker," as printer, editor and writer. It was not an easy task to keep the "Truth Seeker" going all these years, but no one could have borne the burden better than sturdy George E. Macdonald, and only advancing age compelled him to hand over his chair to a younger man. This is not exactly a "Sugar Plum," but we had nowhere else for the moment to express our sympathy with his family in their loss. We hope to deal more lengthily with his work next week in a special article.

The Bishop of Chelmsford (Dr. Henry Wilson) says of the Pope's humbugging appeal to the Allies not to be too hard on the Nazis:—

"It is difficult to remember one single word from the Pope in condemnation of the Nazis when they swept London with destruction. Vatican politics are anti-democratic. The best interests of the Church, according to the Roman view, are served by a government which approximates to a dictatorship, particularly if, as in Spain, the dictator is himself a Roman Catholic."

It is, of course, a piece of downright impudence for the Vatican to deny, on the one hand, that it does not interfere with the policies of different States, and on the other claim to be treated by other countries as though the Papacy actually represented an independent State. The worst form of all is the way in which members of our own Government pay official visits to the Vatican. Roman Catholicism is a religion, not a State. But everywhere we find the Roman Church treated as though its subjects stood on the same level as visitors from a recognised State.

Coming across two expressions from two daily papers that we have in England complete freedom of thought reminded us that the deadliest kind of lying may often be a half-truth. A lady writer in the "Daily Worker" remarks that certain countries named "never had that complete religious freedom we now have in Great Britain." Well, it is quite true that for nearly a century we have had in this country the right to decline Christianity, and even to argue against it. But it is little more than 100 years since men and women were being sent to prison for discrediting the Christian religion, and even when that attack on freedom was weakened, blasphemy prosecutions cropped up every now and again. The founder of this journal spent twelve months in prison for the same religiously manufactured "crimes." We have ourselves been concerned with at least three blasphemy prosecutions (we hasten to say that we were not a principal in any of the cases), and the House of Commons steadily refuses to abolish the Common Law of blasphemy. There has been a measure of freedom in this country, but its religious freedom has been of a very peculiar type.

But there is a time when laws in the protection of religion offer the least evils. The greater evil, at a certain stage, comes from the social, the commercial, and the political punishments for openness of speech. We are, while the war is on, falling over each other in praise of those in the armed forces. Yet, while the law gives permission for men and women in the Services to be registered as of no religion, every obstacle is placed in their way, and in a large number of cases the National Secular Society has had to interfere to secure the man his legal rights.

And when we leave the stratum of society and come to men in business—particularly small shopkeepers—there is the same attempt at penalising the man who is rash enough to honestly say that he is an Atheist. And when we have done with this, we have another example of petty persecution. The lady whom we are quoting, Miss Monica Whateley, must know better even than we do what a handicap it is for a man who wishes to have a "political career" to let the world know that he is an Atheist. Certainly we have a measure of liberty that may or may not be greater than exists elsewhere. But we are inclined to think that there are not many countries where the incentive to play the hypocrite, and live a daily lie, is greater than it is in this land of liberty. About ten or twelve is the number who are present when the chaplain reads the prayers in the House of Commons—unless it is a show day and there is a rush for seats. And yet if some Member of Parliament was to bring forward a proposal to abandon the daily prayers there would be strong opposition, even warm indignation, for fear of what would happen in their constituencies. We really do not see that we have, or ever had or are likely to have for a long while, complete freedom where religion is concerned.

THE ISLES OF GREECE

(Continued from page 365)

A FEW years ago a friend wrote to me as follows: "We visited Via Reggio, where the cremation of Shelley's body took place. It is unrecognisable except for its sea, where (as at Lerici) a few unexpected sails give verisimilitude. Via Reggio has grown into a bright watering-place, with many bathing huts, and is said to be second to the Lido in popularity. It was very quiet when we saw it; but so was the Lido, both being out of season."

The subsequent history of Shelley's ill-fated yacht is but little known. It was imparted to me by my friend the late Mr. Ernest Law, whose father was one of the officers who purchased her, as follows:—

She was bought in 1827 at Zante—apparently on the recommendation of Trelawny, who was living there at that time—by the officers of the 51st Regiment, then stationed in the island. They paid £50 for her to the captain of a brig trading from England. Shelley gave £80 for her to Captain Roberts, who built her.

She was a seaworthy boat, the officers using her for going across to Tornese Castle, on the coast of the Morea opposite, and one of them taking a month's cruise in her to the island of Calamos. She was, however, an ill-fated craft, being soon after wrecked and smashed to pieces by breaking away from her moorings in a gale one night when the private in charge, formerly a sailor, left her to go ashore on a drinking bout.

Byron's reference to Shelley's sacrifice of his fortune for others may be verified by a few instances. Owing to this impulsive generosity, the allowance of £1,000 a year made by his father was frequently insufficient for the needs of the poet and his family, and many were the requests made to his bankers for payments in advance of the quarterly instalments of his income.

Provision was made for the unhappy Claire Clairmont, Mary's half-sister and Byron's forsaken mistress, whose welfare was always the subject of Shelley's affectionate care.

Among others, Peacock must be provided for, and £100 a year was allotted to him. And then Charles Clairmont. This young man, Claire's brother, had fallen in love and "would be exquisitely happy if he could unite himself with the object of his affection." "To settle," he wrote, "at some sequestered vale among the Pyrenean mountains and cultivate a little métairie. Do I dream, my dear Shelley, when a gleam of gay hope gives me reason to doubt of the impossibility of my scheme?" An Elysium—at Shelley's expense.

The amiable and ever impecunious Leigh Hunt was a constant recipient of assistance; and later, in Italy, Henry Revelley's abortive project of constructing a steam vessel to ply between Leghorn, Genoa and Marseilles was financed by Shelley—and ended in disaster.

In addition to these benefactions, Shelley had paid the debts of his first wife, Harriet, and settled £200 a year on her; and borrowed large sums to content Godwin's many creditors. Eventually, the demands of the insatiable Godwin became so insistent and exacting that Shelley had to conceal them from Mary and protest against their "style of haughtiness and encroachment."

The demands of Shelley's many beneficiaries were indeed as importunate as those of the daughter of the horse-leech; or of the Fugians, whose iteration of the "odious word" Yammerschooner (give me) rang unceasingly in Darwin's ears when he visited their inhospitable shore in the "Beagle."

Byron lies in the village church at Hucknall. When his funeral cortège passed through London, one who was present wrote: "In conformity to a singular custom of the great, a long train of their empty coaches followed the mourning

coaches, mocking the dead with idle state. On his desolate corpse no wife looked, no child shed a tear." But there were two women who paid that last tribute, for Mary Shelley and Jane Williams watched the passing of the funeral train from a window of a small house in Kentish Town.

Byron's grave should be on one of those Isles of Greece which inspired his finest verse: an isle gilded with eternal sunshine and encircled by "the glad waters of the deep blue sea."

Shelley, Keats and Trelawny are buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome. When Trelawny visited Rome in 1823 he purchased a secluded recess under the shadow of the Pyramid of Caius Cestius with sufficient space for two graves. Shelley's remains were reinterred there, but 59 years elapsed before Trelawny was laid beside the "divine poet" whom he revered as one of the most admirable of mankind. The poet's heart is not there; snatched from the pyre by Trelawny's hand, it passed to the possession of Leigh Hunt, by whom it was given to Mary Shelley. After Mary's death the relic was enclosed in a silver casket and remained in the Boscombe home of Sir Percy and Lady Shelley. On the death of the former it was buried with him at St. Peter's Church, Bournemouth.

Those who are acquainted with the story of Shelley's brief life may be interested in the following enumeration of some of the many domiciles in this country which he occupied during his wanderings. Sion House Academy, Brantford, Shelley's first school, was some 30 years ago a fine old house, partly Elizabethan. It had a large garden, and on the wall giving on the road was a commodious gazebo; but many changes have taken place since then and the old house has probably disappeared.

When the two infidels, Shelley and Hogg, were expelled from Oxford, they sought for lodgings in London, and finally settled themselves at No. 15, Poland Street, Oxford Street. This choice was made because Shelley's fancy was taken by a gay paper in the parlour which had a pattern of trellis, vine leaves and clusters of grapes. "Poland," too, reminded him of Miss Porter's romance, "Thaddeus of Warsaw"—and liberty. "We must stay here," said Shelley, "for ever."

I often wonder if a fragment of the paper with the vine leaves and clusters of grapes may remain beneath later accretions. It may be so, for some of the faded chintz-pattern paper which adorned the sick room of Elizabeth Barrett was uncovered when No. 50, Wimpole Street was pulled down a few years ago.

Tanyrallt, Portmadoc, where Shelley lived in 1812, and made the acquaintance of Southey, has been added to, and the small-paned windows have been replaced by large sheets of glass. During their tenancy, Harriet wrote: "We simple people live here in a cottage extensive enough for the villa of an Italian prince."

In the summer of 1812 Shelley and Harriet were settled at Lynnmouth in cottage lodgings where "the beds were coarse as those of peasants." This cottage was pulled or burnt down many years ago. Of the houses in Dublin where Shelley and Harriet lodged, I am told that No. 9, Sackville Street has been rebuilt and that No. 35, Cuffe Street is unaltered. But Cuffe Street, which might have been termed "respectable" in 1813, is dull and dingy now.

Hogg describes how the poet was to be seen in May, 1813, at the window of his lodgings at 34, Half Moon Street, Mayfair (chosen by Harriet as being fashionable), "All day long, book in hand, with lively gestures and bright eyes like some young lady's lark."

In June, 1813, Ianthe, Shelley's first child, was born, and Hogg recorded that he called at a small house in Pimlico to inquire for Harriet and her daughter.

(Continued on page 380)

CORRESPONDENCE

MONTGOMERY AND GOD.

Sir,—Field-Marshal Montgomery, addressing his soldiers after the enemy's defeat, explained to them that:—

"This was the Lord's doings, and it is marvellous in our eyes" (Psalm 118, 23).

This is modesty in the hour of victory, and I, as a member of the Jewish race, should be the last to criticise a Cromwellian general who, while quoting our psalms, smote the Philistines and Midianites by "the sword of the Lord and Gideon," and incidentally saved my race from total extinction.

Unfortunately, though, I am an unbelieving Jew and cannot see the connection between the Lord and victory. From what I know of history, He is a very shifty gentleman and one who usually (as Napoleon said) "fights on the side of the stronger battalions." That may not be always true, but quite evident is the Lord's habit of sitting on the fence. So much so that an English clergyman, during a period of indecision in the Crimean War, once reproached him with this indecision and point-blank asked him "to come down on our side of the fence."

But why did He not—in this bigger war—come down on the other side? Surely they deserved it as well?

You, sir, alone amongst the reviews (as far as I am aware) have repeatedly pointed out that the Hitler movement is not that of an irreligious people. Hitler himself, as a German and a Catholic, may not be versed in the Hebrew psalms as well as Montgomery, but he is no doubt—if we disregard superficial evidence—deeply imbued by the spirit, if not the letter, of the Old and New Testaments. He, too, is a Saviour, a Messiah, accepted and acclaimed as such by his people (as reported in Ambassador Dodd's secret diary under the date of August 28, 1934, and April 22, 1937). And he is aware of his secret mission; he declared himself a profoundly religious man; he considers himself as the "Instrument of Providence" that "could not allow a people like our own to cut off its thread of life."

For this people of his is likewise a "chosen" one, and under his leadership called to found a "Reich" of a thousand years, such as promised under the name of "Kingdom" by Jesus Christ Himself—a Kingdom where the devil would be "thrown into a bottomless pit" and "should deceive the nations no more" (Revelation xx., 1-3).

Hitler's intense and obviously sincere anti-Semitism arises just from this idea that he battles and is responsible for the glorious future of his own chosen people. It is for this "holy" reason that he has to eliminate the older variety, for "there cannot be two Chosen People in the world: now we are God's people" (reported by Hermann Rauschning in his book "Hitler Speaks"). And further on, pp. 149-150 of the same book, Rauschning reports the following address of Hitler to a meeting of overseas Germans:—

"Just as the Jews became the all-embracing world power they are to-day only in their dispersal, so should we to-day, as the true Chosen People of God, become in our dispersal the omnipotent power, the Masters of the Earth."

One more puzzling question: Why did Montgomery's "Lord of Hosts" and Hitler's "Providence" allow an internecine war between His two most chosen, favoured and inspired peoples? Surely this was neither wise nor right nor good of Him? Does He perhaps, like an Epicurean God, watch human affairs from the stratosphere without troubling about what is going on below? Or, worse still, does He not watch at all, and is He perhaps quite ignorant of what happens down here?

"Si le Bon Dieu savait seulement quel tort il se fait avec cette guerre!" said a French peasant woman to a Professor of the Sorbonne.

But this no doubt is blasphemous, because it takes a too low opinion of the Lord.

Much more probable, and also more charitable, is Stendhal's explanation:—

"La seule chose qui excuse Dieu c'est qu'il n'existe pas."—Yours, etc.,

OSCAR LEVY.

(Editor of the authorised English translation of Nietzsche's works.)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held September 24, 1944

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, presided.

Also present: Messrs. A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Seibert, Ebury, Lupton, Silvester, Page, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented.

New members were admitted to Chester-le-Street, Oxford, Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester, Keighley, Jarrow, North London and West London Branches and the parent Society.

The Chapman will case has at last been decided in the Indian Courts, and in favour of the N.S.S. and R.P.A.

Items remitted from the Annual Conference resulted in the formation of a Yorkshire area of N.S.S. branches, adoption of a suggestion for an N.S.S. handbook, possible publications suitable for children, and a discussion on other items.

Lecture reports from Messrs. Brighton, Clayton and Blackburn were noted, arrangements for meetings in Glasgow and Bradford sanctioned, and reports of activity from Oxford, Keighley and West London Branches were before the meeting.

A recent meeting having for its object the revival of the International Freethought Organisation was reported. N.S.S. delegates attended and a number of European countries were represented. It was a promising start, and another meeting has been arranged to examine further proposals.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

OBITUARY

JOHN BEGGS.

An ardent Freethinker, John Beggs, of Belfast, was buried on September 18. There was a large gathering of relatives and friends. Mr. Beggs, who was 65 years of age, was conscious almost to the last, and gave very definite instructions that he had to be buried "without benefit of clergy" and that he wished a secular service. Fortunately, Mr. John Lessels, a veteran Irish Freethinker, was at liberty, and the wishes of the deceased were admirably carried out. Mr. Beggs was a splendid type, and he was exceedingly well read in all humanitarian works.

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., C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., LL.D.:

"On Making a Peace."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m.,

Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. T.

MOSLEY.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—

Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. H. M. SMITH: "The Gigantic Delusion."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—

Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. T. L. SMITH: "The Polish Question."

Leeds (Room C, Trades Hall, 4, Upper Fountain Street,

Leeds).—A meeting will be held on Sunday, October 8, at

7 p.m., with the purpose of organising Freethought

propaganda.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday,

6.30 p.m., Mr. T. H. ELSTON: "Education—The Mountain in

Labour."

Newcastle-on-Tyne N.S.S. Branch (Socialist Café, Old Arcade,

Pilgrim Street, Newcastle).—Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

THE HORRORS OF ATHEISM

"THE horrors of Atheism" is one of those stock phrases always on tap by the average Christian. Its popularity is due to the ease with which it can be flung about by a fool or a humbug. A knowledge of Atheism is not necessary; lying for the glory of God and the Christian courtesy of blackguarding opponents can be freely exercised; the darker shades of human nature can be given a spiritual airing without offending Christian conscience; whilst any attempt to offer proof would be quite un-Christian, and is not done. Indeed, the "horrors of Atheism" has done such long and faithful service to the Churches that it deserves to be incorporated as an additional article of Christian faith. It has no foundation in fact—and there is no better qualification for an article of religious faith. "I believe in the horrors of Atheism, and all the stories told and untold in the past, present and future concerning Atheists" should be acceptable to all brands of Christians.

To be quite fair to Christians, an effort was made to show the horrors of Atheism under an Atheistic Government in Soviet Russia. It was genuinely Christian in its method and intent. The social achievements of the Soviet Government were denied publicity in this country, but lies without end were churned out on the horrors of the Russian system. When Russia was attacked and retreating before the Nazis we were very shy about referring to her as an ally, as though she was not nice to know. It was only when the military might of Russia began to fling back the common enemy that our superior attitude began to subside and we ventured, on a little praise, which has grown—with her victories—into full recognition of Russia as a worthy ally, a wonderful people, and a Great Power. History repeats itself. The same measure of judgment—military might—fastened the label of "great" upon Japan when she emerged victorious from the Russo-Japanese War.

Two recent publications reveal some of the "horrors of Atheism" inflicted upon the people of Soviet Russia. At the national convention of professors and administrative officers held in the Moscow Kremlin in 1938 Mr. V. M. Molotov stated that the number of Russian students in college-grade schools exceeded the combined figures for Germany, England, France and Italy. There are no sex distinctions. In 1939, 60 per cent. of all physicians were women; many women were directors of medicine and other sciences. Among all classes, old and young, there was a keenness for education inspired by the teachings of Lenin and other leaders. How shocking! Our political leaders are clear of that charge. They are more concerned about religion. And what a religion—representative of primitive ideas about the supernatural current 2,000 years ago. A religion riddled by criticism, cut to ribbons by modern thought, unheeded by 90 per cent. of the population, yet decreed by our M.P.s as the first item for consideration in our schools.

In religion, our political leaders are a century behind the rest of the population. In June of this year the third meeting of the Anti-Fascist Society of Soviet Scientists met at Moscow. An account was given of the great contribution of Soviet men of science to the war effort. The orgy of Nazi destruction was denounced. Nobody present suggested it was "like old times." There were expressions of sorrow at the destruction of scientific and public institutions, monuments of Russian art, cultural centres and academies, and a great desire to finish the war so that the rebuilding of their social structure can proceed. That feeling and concern for the finer side of human achievements—education, science, art, culture and useful citizenship—could never come from a corrupt and rotten social order as broadcast by Christian "truth" about Russia.

"The fortune of war" is a common saying involving the

good and the bad. As far as the Churches are concerned, it is very doubtful if anything else but very bad fortune will come from the war. Certainly one of the worst results of the war inflicted upon the Churches will be the unexpected exposure of the colossal Christian lying on the horrors of Atheism in Soviet Russia.

R. H. ROSETTI.

THE ISLES OF GREECE

(Concluded from page 378)

Thomas Crofton Croker, in his "A Walk from London to Fulham," 1896, states: "At No. 41, Hans Place, Shelley once lodged; in 1885 the house was raised two stories and renewed." This was no doubt the house referred to by Hogg.

In August, 1813, and shortly before their separation, Shelley and Harriet were living at High Elms, Bracknell, where the poet attained his majority. High Elms is an attractive Georgian house to which some additions have been made of late years. Adjoining Blackfriars Road there is an early 19th century backwater named Nelson Square, which has known better days. On the north-east corner there is, or was not long ago, a house once tenanted by Shelley and Mary. It is marked by a tablet, and was on the occasion of my last visit sadly in want of repair.

At Bishopgate, on the borders of Windsor Forest, there is a secluded cottage, still known as "Shelley's," which was occupied by Shelley and Mary in 1815. It was from there that they set forth, accompanied by Peacock and Charles Clairmont, on a ten days' river excursion to visit the source of the Thames; but at Inglesham they found that the river was no longer navigable. It was nearby, at Lechlade, that Shelley wrote the beautiful poem, "A Summer Evening Churchyard."

In the autumn of 1816, Shelley, Mary and their infant son, William, were in lodgings above Davies' Library, No. 5, Abbey Churchyard, Bath, adjoining the fashionable Pump Room. This house, and others adjoining, were taken down in 1893. Nearby is No. 12, New Bond Street, where Claire Clairmont gave birth at this time to a girl, the daughter of Lord Byron. The ground floor of No. 12 is now an optician's shop; otherwise it is unchanged.

Bath was in 1816 as Mr. Pickwick knew it, a favourite resort of the fashionable world; and the balls at the assembly rooms were, as described by Angelo Cyrus Bantam, the elegant M.C.: "Moments snatched from Paradise; rendered bewitching by music, beauty, elegance, fashion, etiquette, and above all by the absence of tradespeople, who are quite inconsistent with Paradise." We have no record of Shelley and Mary taking part in these entertainments. They seem, indeed, to have known no one in that gay city, and the latter part of their stay was overshadowed by the tragic death of Mary's half-sister, Fanny, the "Barrier Girl," daughter of Mary Woolstonecraft and Imlay.

In December, 1816, Shelley, Mary and their infant son, William, migrated to Albion House, Marlow; and with them were Claire Clairmont and her daughter Alba, Byron's child. This house was chosen for them by Thomas Love Peacock, who lived in Marlow, to be, as Shelley said, "a fixed, settled, eternal home." But a year later Mary wrote to Mr. M. A. Baxter: "This house is very damp; all the books in the library are mildewed. We must quit it"; and before the swallows came again Shelley departed for Italy—never to return. When, in 1883, I lodged at Albion House during a Thames-side holiday, it had changed but little since the poet's tenancy; and my landlady was so old that she might have seen him returning from the backwaters of Medmenham, "on his head a wreath of old man's beard and wild flowers intermixed." Alas! she knew but his name.

EDGAR SYERS.