

# THE FREETHINKER

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## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Price of War

IT may be questioned, outside the family and the circle of intimate friends, whether anyone was seriously shocked by the news of the assassination of Lord Moyne. Sorry we may all feel, but there has been too much killing and too many wounded, too many cases of ruined homes, too many thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of children slaughtered or injured, for us to feel shocked at the killing of one man. If there had been no mechanical adaptation to the killing of men, women and children during the past five years, half the population of the country would have been in lunatic asylums. But we have been hardened by five years of a war that has almost abolished the distinction between soldiers and civilians. We civilians have known what it is to eat our breakfast to the sounds of whirling bombs, even though we were aware that the bombs which have missed us meant death and destruction not very far away. The situation is inevitable. Life could not continue were it otherwise. Nature equips us to face the maximum of suffering with the minimum of pain, and there are circumstances where to hold our heads higher in the midst of suffering counts to our credit. Let us be as honest to death as death is with us. An understanding of death can never be far away from an appreciation of life. One cannot be understood without the other; so we express sympathy with the family of Lord Moyne as we do to any non-intimate individual. Honestly, we can go no further, and in holding our heads high may snatch a little good from evil and sense from folly.

The two men responsible for the death of Lord Moyne will pay the ordered price for their crime. If they go to the grave unsung they will not die unnoticed. They may even find some consolation in the notoriety they have achieved. There are, we would say, more people interested in an execution than are moved by the birth of a baby. Our interest is concerned, for the present, not so much with the brace of assassins as with some of the newspaper comments on them. They have supplied the world with the information that both of the men in prison belonged to the same group of religionists as did Jesus Christ—assuming that he existed. It has been emphasised that the two men arrested were believers in the Jewish religion. The information may be correct, but it is rather curious that in the case of other crimes there is no emphasis laid on the fact that the offender is a Roman Catholic, or a worshipping member of the Church of England, a Baptist, etc. The illustrative particularity of the information given may give rise to the suspicion that there is some kind of move on the part of our Press to establish a monopoly of criminality for the Christian religion. But I hesitate to think that this idea was in the minds of the newspapers we have examined.

Some explanation of this particularising of the Jewish religion is given in the statement that the killing of Lord Moyne may excite ill-feeling against the Jews in Palestine. But why should this be the case? Surely no one can be blind to the fact that Christian, Mohammedan and other religious groups can well hold their own with reference to crime. In this country the overwhelming number of those who commit murder are Christians, and when they march to the gallows it is in the company of a Christian clergyman. If the man who is to be hanged is a Roman Catholic, his passage to the scaffold is soothed by the presence of a Catholic priest, who commends the criminal to the mercy of God, and so soothes the last moments with the belief that in heaven he will be welcomed even if he is not wanted on earth. No Christian appears to be shocked by these proceedings; they are taken as being quite justifiable. It is a puzzling situation, but we protest strongly against Christians and other religious bodies acting as though only they are entitled to enter our prisons. To be quite serious, so far as we can see, goodness, like badness, is not a prerogative of any religious sect. But we also observe that while the non-religion of an Atheist charged with crime receives the utmost publicity, we are seldom informed that the man who is being sent to prison is a member of this or that Church. I am opposed to monopolies. They always have an evil consequence.

### That Jewish Race

I did not commence these notes with the intention of discussing whether Christians, non-Christians or believers in God played the greater part in populating our prisons. But one may distil good from bad, provided the distiller has sufficient wit to take proper advantage of the occasion. For example, we noted that it was carefully pointed out that the killers of Lord Moyne were members of the "Jewish race." The first of these two words may be permissible in the circumstances, but in that case the phrase should have stopped with the first word. The conjunction of the last is without justification, and may react in a very objectionable manner. I know it represents common usage, and it is often used by the Prime Minister and lesser parliamentary lights, but it is a term that should be avoided considering that the Allies will probably find that word brought before them, and in that case there would logically lie the task of destroying some sixty millions of Germans, and that, if a feasible proposition, is in fact an impossible one. The settlement of Europe can only be achieved by a good understanding of human nature. Without that, a real pacification of Europe, to say nothing of the outside world, is an impossibility. "Race" and "instinct" are two terms which either mean nothing at all or give an entirely wrong view of the human nature that is to be handled. If we may paraphrase Mohammed, speech, correct speech, and sound ideas really are mightier than the sword.

In sober truth, the use of such words as "race" in the present world situation can only deceive and confuse when clarity of thought and correctness of speech are most important. Sometimes the difficulty of either defining or describing intelligently what is meant by "race" is increased by the introduction of the "British race," the "Welsh race," the Scandinavian, the German, the French or the Italian "race," and many others. All this is confusion, but often it is confusing with a purpose.

But the Jewish race. Where does that come from? What does it mean? Those who are fondest of the term seldom stop to explain; if they did they might be led to appreciate its utterly misleading character. It serves as a "fill-up," particularly when one wishes to round-off a sentence; it is then just a substitute for thinking." A usually reliable dictionary defines "race" as consisting of "a variety or division of mankind, the members of which possess certain distinctive, permanent varieties which will produce a type," and then proceeds to blanket intelligibility with a definition that wipes out the one given by saying, "or a class or group of persons having some spiritual, intellectual, or other characteristic in common." Dr. Hertz, in his "Race and Civilisation," after surveying the facts, expresses surprise and regret that "so many scholars have fallen victims to the demon contained in this idea of race"; and John Stuart Mill, with characteristic directness and honesty, says that "of all the vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effects of social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing diversities and character to inherent natural differences." That certainly goes some distance towards exposing the humbug and ignorance that lies behind the sociological use of "race." It may be taken as a late substitute for that Christian stupidity, "original sin." Finally, we may note that Professor Julian Huxley, in his "We Europeans," and with direct reference to the Christian-made "Jewish question," says categorically that "the word Jew is valid more as a socio-religious or pseudo-national description than as an ethical term in any genetic sense."

That is strictly correct. There never was a Jewish race, any more than there has ever been a German race or a British race. The whole of the talk about race, applied to human groups, is, as we shall see later, just undiluted nonsense. It has as much existence in reality as has the "blue blood" of an hereditary aristocracy or the "Royal blood" of a king. There are as many varieties of Jews as there are of French, of Germans, and of many other peoples. Mohammedans, Hindoos, and many others, also have their peculiarities, but no one refers to these differences as examples of being due to "race." And in any case, the differences do no more than bear testimony to the influence of the general environment. Dr. Fishberg, who has published one of the sanest books written on "the Jews," failed to find in the course of his scientific examination of Jews of many nations entering the U.S.A. any distinctiveness that would warrant the use of the word "race." Even the Jewish nose exhibited itself on the faces of a very small number of the Jewish immigrants. But with such an unscientific and completely absurd phrase such as "it is in the blood" coming from writers and lecturers, the vogue of these phrases need not surprise us. Later we shall have to stress the point that it is in fact the absence of the power

of "race" to transmit special qualities that provides the key to understand why and how humanity has developed.

For the present we must repeat that Jews have no qualities that deserve to be called "racial." In respect of innate, specifically cultural qualities, man is of all living things the most poorly equipped, and the purely biological inheritance of the Jew fares just as do other groups, and for precisely the same reason. What we find, in fact, in past and contemporary history, is that the Jews are a very widely distributed people, and apart from their religion, which has followed them like a veritable Old Man of the sea, the Jew takes his social tone from the people around him. He is found in ancient India, in ancient China, in old Russia, in old Greece and Rome, in Germany, in Poland, and elsewhere, and in every case he fits—when permitted—into the texture of the social state around him. Very much also to the point is the fact that, contrary to popular belief (encouraged by the Jews, and also the Roman Catholics who conceal the number of their backsliders in matrimony, both acting from the same motive), there is the important fact of intermarrying.

I think I will close this section of my story with the following quotation from the excellent book referred to, "Race and Civilisation," by Dr. Hertz, published in 1928. He says:—

"The common notion is that the Jews are a homogeneous race, and without further ado they are identified with the Semitic trait. . . . But the one people generally accepted as the purest expression of the Semitic racial type, namely, Bedouins of the Arabian desert, are distinguished by small, straight noses, thin lips, soft curly or wavy hair, and that the characteristic Jewish note is due to a Hittite strain in the Jewish racial stock. The Hittite nose is a common feature among the Armenians, whose language belonged to the Indo-Germanic family. Beside, Semites and Hittites and Amorites, who probably were Aryans, formed a component part of the racial stock. The vulgar notion of the Indo-Germans and Semites being in radical contrast to one another is, at any rate, quite untenable. The close physical kinship of these two racial groups has, on the contrary, been established beyond dispute by anthropological research, and the more information we get on the prehistoric culture of Western Asia, the more it becomes evident that numerous contacts and crossings must have taken place.

"The Jews, therefore, during the whole of their history have always absorbed appreciable infiltrations of foreign blood, a fact which partly explains the variations of types one meets among them. Conversions to the Jewish religion of Greeks, Romans and other nationals occurred very frequently. . . . The Jews unquestionably are the product of manifold crossings. The enormous share they have taken, and still take, in the intellectual and moral development of the world is therefore a strong proof against the alleged noxiousness of racial crossings."

This is a long story, and I will deal with further phases of this development.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

## THE MEDICINAL ART OF OLD NILE

THE contributions of ancient Egypt to medical science were invaluable. That country's fame as a centre of the art of healing was widely acknowledged in classical times. Homer and Herodotus, among others, testify to this, and it is said that Cyrus applied to Egypt for an oculist and that other Eastern rulers regarded the Egyptians as the premier physicians.

That the foundations of medicine were laid in the Nile valley, many thousands of years ago, is practically certain. Nor is this surprising when we recall Egyptian triumphs in architecture and engineering. Her majestic monuments have successfully resisted the ravages of centuries and remain as witnesses of former power.

In addition to many other revolutionary discoveries, a large number of documents have come to light—the medical papyri—which preserve details of the prescriptions and procedure of Nile's physicians and surgeons. These papyri are, or were, housed in various museums and have been carefully examined by experts, and it is chiefly from their analysis that our knowledge of Nilotic medicine is derived.

Magic and science were closely intertwined in ancient Egypt, but as Professor Thorndike has shown, this combination continued until comparatively recent generations. Naturally then, the magic art which played a prominent part in the domestic life of Egypt was reflected in its science. For magic was applied not only to the living, but the dead. As Dr. Warren Dawson observes in his suggestive essay on Medicine in that informative volume, "The Legacy of Egypt" (Oxford University Press, 1942): "By the Egyptian magic was believed to be a sure means of accomplishing all his necessities and desires . . . Amongst the numerous purposes for which magic was employed, the activities of the magician were most commonly met with in the prevention and cure of sickness and injury. In the numerous medico-magical texts that have come down to us the idea of possession is very evident, for diseases are treated as if personified and are harangued and addressed by the magician. It is generally stated or implied that the disease or suffering is due to the actual presence in the patient's body of the demon itself, but almost as often it is implied that the suffering is due to some poison or other evil emanation that the demon has projected into the patient's body."

If one remedy failed another was tried and alternative spells were provided to banish the evil spirit. Prescriptions of drugs are prominent in the medical papyri and evidently spells were uttered over them to make them efficacious. The doses administered frequently contain disgusting ingredients which were intended to disconcert the baleful spirit and hasten his departure from the patient's body.

Still, some of the early remedies had distinct medical value, and later, greater reliance was placed on those drugs that effected frequent cures. Thus the scientific practitioner slowly emerged from the magician. Nevertheless, magic persisted to the last and in the latest papyri rational procedure and demonology are still blended. The Greeks were seemingly the first to completely emancipate medicine from magic, but magical beliefs, even in Greece, never died out among the populace. As Dr. Dawson notes: "Magic maintained powerful sway throughout the early centuries of the Christian era and throughout the Middle Ages: it persisted into the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and is by no means extinct to-day, even among civilised nations."

Dawson suggests that the merry andrew and the quack cure-all advertiser have succeeded the old-time magician and perhaps he might have included the exorcists of the Catholic Church.

The embalming of the corpse, with the careful removal of the visceral organs, rendered the Egyptians familiar with the human body's internal structures. It also acquainted them with

the preservative properties of the salts and other chemicals they utilised in this task. They were fully aware of the resemblance of man's anatomy to that of other mammals. Their hieroglyphic signs which represent man's body organs, especially the visceral, are those of lower animals. Dawson surmises that Egyptian knowledge of lower mammalian anatomy preceded their acquaintance with that of man. It is certainly noteworthy that these animal signs continued in use when the Egyptians were dealing with the corresponding organs in mankind.

Although Egyptian knowledge of the outstanding organs of the human body became fairly complete, there was an entire failure in understanding the functions of the nerves, muscles, arteries and veins. The extent of their physiological information remains uncertain, but probably future discovery of medical documents will solve this problem. Apparently, the ancient Nile dwellers were unaware that the blood circulated, although they appreciated the dependence of the pulse on the movements of the heart. This organ they deemed man's most important structure. Dawson considers that the heart was regarded as "the seat of intelligence and of all the emotions (they attached no importance at all to the brain), and its presence in the body was so important that it was not even removed from the body during mummification but was carefully left together with all its great vessels in its place in the thorax, although all the other viscera were removed."

As already indicated, magic was associated with medicine in Egypt to the very end. Much as in the New Testament, insanity was attributed to diabolical possession and demonology dominated therapeutics. Prescriptions in the medical papyri are headed with such titles as "driving out," "killing," "terrifying" or "banishing" disease. Internal ailments all appear to have been treated as the work of demons but, from an early period, wounds and other afflictions obviously the result of natural causes were treated on purely rational principles.

Papyri relating to pathology prove hard to interpret satisfactorily. But the maladies that afflict the fellahin to-day are clearly of old standing. The papyri mention intestinal complaints due to contaminated water; affections of the eyes including ophthalmia; sores, boils; the bites of venomous animals, dermatitis and bilharzia disease, among others. Lung, liver, bladder and other troubles were common and there is remedial treatment prescribed for rheumatic and arthritic ailments, as well as diseases special to women. Finally, the papyri contain directions for the disposal of flies, fleas and other noxious insects.

Surgery progressed in Egypt, but even here, magic persisted. Dr. Dawson concludes from a careful survey of the relevant papyri that: "A wound or injury caused by a fall or other accident . . . was well understood and generally treated by rational means; but the causes of headache and fever, of skin eruptions or swellings, and of countless other maladies were wholly mysterious and attributed to supernatural causes." Yet the truth remains that modern medical science saw its inception in ancient Egypt. Drugs now in universal use were first employed by Nilotic physicians. Hippocrates himself seems indebted to Egyptian forerunners. Moreover, the oldest medical documents come from Egypt and in that land the earliest experiments in surgery and pharmacy were conducted. There were the beginnings of anatomical science and the first known use of several appliances still serviceable to modern surgery.

For more than 20 centuries the practice of mummification had familiarised the Egyptian people with the opening of the dead human body. "It was in Egypt," writes Dr. Dawson, "mainly in Alexandria, that it became possible for the Greek physicians and anatomists of the Ptolemaic age to practise for the first time the systematic dissection of the human body which religion and popular prejudice forbade in their own country and in all other parts of the world. To this fact alone the true science of medicine owes its origin and the possibility of its development."

T. F. PALMER.

## ROYAL NICKNAMES

### I

HOWEVER much reverence or homage has been shown to Royalty, including toadying, their subjects and often their sycophants have been critical behind their backs. Revolution or assassination has sometimes finalised the attitude of those ruled over by wicked or oppressive monarchs. More lightly there has been the ascription of nicknames, a few indicating high esteem, though some of these are unmistakably sardonic, down to forth-right terms of hatred or contempt.

"Great" occurs after the names of numerous rulers, for a variety of reasons, not all complimentary. Our own Alfred seems to deserve the honour. It would be difficult now to find any cause why he should be deprived of it.

Theodoric, King of the Italian Goths in the fifth century, appears to have justly carried the title Great, as does Akbar, Mogul Emperor of India in the sixteenth century. Others termed Great were Cyrus of Persia, Pompey Triumvir of Rome, Alexander of Macedon, Herod of Judea, Constantine and Theodosius Emperors of Rome, Canute of England, and Ivan and Peter of Russia.

Charlemagne is merely a Latinised form of Charles the Great. Perhaps similarly we find Edmund the First of England styled the Magnificent.

Some of these earned the cognomen Great by their beneficence, the excellence of their rule. But far too often they were only great conquerors, or merely great slaughterers of masses of people. Abdul al Raschid meant The Just, of which there can be two opinions.

Herbert Spencer says Frederick the Great of Prussia should be Frederick the Greedy. One might say worse of him, but he is not alone in that he helped to set going policies of which we still reap evil repercussions.

Back among the misty and not very interesting Saxon and Danish rulers of England we find Edward the Elder, Edgar the Peaceable, Edward the Martyr, Edmund Ironside, Harold Harefoot and Edward the Confessor. Not a striking list of appended names, not particularly enlightening, no very great tribute to the wit or penetration or character judgment of the Saxons. Their best attempt was Ethelrede the Unrede, or Ethelrede Redeless, that is the ready king who was not ready.

### II

Spain gives us two. Alfonso the Wise of Castile, which seems to have been fairly well earned, and Pedro the Cruel, thoroughly applicable, though our own Black Prince wasted soldiers and ruined his own health in useless support of this monster.

Many of the nicknames are reflections upon peculiarities of the monarchs; must have angered them if they heard, and drawn upon the utterers violent punishments. Yet these epithets were repeated, often enough to become permanently attached, for us to find in documents of the period.

There have been a Charles the Fat, the Simple, and the Bald, also an Ethelbald of England. It has been suggested that Baldwin was Bald Edwin and Ethelbald the Bald King, but the etymology of this is doubtful. More likely it was Bold. Philip the Fair reminds us of Philip le Bel, Philip the Beautiful, the fourth Philip of Franch. He it was who seized the Pope, and set up another at Avignon. Thus came the great schism of the West, with two Popes contending for headship of the Roman Church.

Our William the Conqueror was better known to his contemporaries as William the Bastard. The story was that his father cast more than longing eyes upon a maiden paddling through a brook, her skirt kilfed, in the days when girls wore a smock only underneath.

Charlemagne's father was Pepin le Bref, the little, the short. Burgundy had a Robert le Diable, who was the devil. Malcolm Canmore of Scotland Anglicised as Malcolm Big Head.

Tarquinius Superbus, Tarquin the Proud, has been immortalised infamously in Shakespeare's "Rape of Lucrece."

To call Julian The Apostate was very likely a terrible condemnation in medieval Church-dominated Europe. To-day we see it differently. We know of many worse emperors than Julian, both Christian and Pagan.

Tamerlane, Timur the Tartar, founder of the Mogul dynasty in India, was Timurlenk, actually Timur the Lame.

On the English throne have been William Rufus, that is Red-head; John Lackland or Curthose; Edward Longshanks, whose Abbey tomb inscription reads Maleus Scotorum, and sometimes more in praise is the Lawgiver, and Richard Crookback.

Nobler is Henry the First's Beauclerk and Richard's Cœur de Lion. There is, however, another aspect of Richard's character beside that of physical courage. In his novel on him Maurice Hewlett dubs him Richard Yea-and-Nay.

### III

Bloody Mary is horrible enough. Old Pretender and Young Pretender not only show us what their contemporaries thought, but kill by a word sympathy or consideration for those two Stuart relics.

Of affection in the nicknames there are few traces. The Virgin Queen was intended to be highly complimentary. It, like Elizabeth's personality and statesmanship, has survived successfully the furies of detraction and extreme adverse criticism.

So has her father's. Bluff King Hal was no misnomer. Incredible as it is to many people, and distasteful to others, King Harry, Henry the Eighth, was widely popular. He had kingly qualities and capacities which most English kings might envy.

Louis the Wellbeloved for the fifteenth French king of that name sounds high praise. So it would be if it meant what his subjects thought of him and he of them. But it was not so. The affection was for and by a few select ladies who shared Louis' love with the Queen.

Farmer George, third of that name, was lucky. He might truthfully have been called something worse. Often was, but the mild friendly humorous prename has stuck.

His son George the Fourth's high-sounding appellation of "First Gentleman in Europe" was a mask for a very questionable person.

Historical research has dealt harshly with Charles the Second. "Old Rowley" and "The Merry Monarch" no longer amuse us.

That efficient and diplomatic Dutch prince, the Prince of Orange, who earned the title of William the Silent, would be sadly out of place nowadays. Modern rulers and leaders think it necessary to orate and declaim and address millions by radio, control the Press, and have a mob of hack writers producing pamphlets and books, all for the simple process of telling the truth, which is a shorter word than propaganda.

Affectionate nicknames are rare. Best known is The Little Corporal for Napoleon Bonaparte, upon which many comments could be made. Suffice it to say the veterans of the Great Army may have been easier imposed upon than even the generality of mankind, a staggering possibility.

In this country we had Victoria and Albert, both "The Good." Let us hope they were, but it was the peak period of nineteenth century moralism, not to say maudlin.

Edward the Seventh's cognomen The Peacemaker has tarnished in the three or four decades since his death, a great European war beginning only four years after it.

To call Abdul Hamid the Second of Turkey Abdul the Damned was too tempting a chance to be missed, and might have influenced his overthrow. The power of words may easily be exaggerated, but must not be underrated.

Royal nicknames are useful pointers, not so much to historical date as to what was popularly thought of the monarchs so labelled or libelled either by their friends or their enemies.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

## THE YOUNG FREETHINKER

### (1) Winnie Meets God

WINNIE MARTIN first heard of God, so as to take any notice, when she was five years old. It happened in this way.

She was on her swing at the end of the garden path watching Jimmy Gordon who lived next door. He had managed to climb on to the lowest branch of one of his father's plum trees, a thing Winnie knew he was forbidden even to try, and was now getting a knee-hold on the next higher one before putting his full weight on it.

Suddenly there came a cracking sound from the tree and a cry of alarm from Jimmy, as the branch gave way and he fell to the ground. Winnie quickly jumped off her swing and ran to the paling separating the two gardens. Fortunately, Jimmy had not fallen very far, and no bones were broken, but he had an ugly graze on his knee, from which the blood was running down his leg. Seeing this, he burst into tears and ran to his mother in the house, while Winnie, very nearly crying in sympathy herself, went to tell her's all about it.

Soon after, Jimmy limped proudly out into the garden again, with a clean white bandage round his knee. Next day, Winnie saw that the bandage had been replaced by a small dressing held in position by means of sticking plaster. Later in the week, that, too, went.

"I'm glad your knee is better, Jimmy," she called to him through the fence.

"Yes, God made it better," he called back.

The word was one she hadn't heard before. "Is that one of your uncles?" she asked, knowing he had several.

"No, silly," he retorted, "God's God."

"I don't know what you mean," the little girl replied.

"Haven't your Mummy and Daddy told you about God?"

"No, what is it?"

"It isn't an it, it's a he. He's someone you can't see, but he made everything and he's everywhere. He punishes you when you are naughty and is kind to you when you do what you are told."

"I must ask my Mummy about him. How do you know he made your knee better?"

"Mummy said so when she took the plaster off this morning."

Winnie lost no time in putting her question. Finding her mother darning in the kitchen, while the dinner was cooking, she said, "Please Mummy, tell me about God."

"What makes you want to know that?" her mother asked, and Winnie told her what Jimmy had said about his knee.

"Well, I should like my little girl to have a clearer idea of how things happen than that," said Mrs. Martin. "I reckon that cut knees get better by themselves in time, if the cut is properly cleaned and regularly dressed. Very soon the bleeding stops, but underneath the cut the blood goes on flowing to the hurt part, and in passing by it leaves behind tiny pieces of the right stuff to form new flesh and skin. All healing of wounds is due to the fact that the blood in our bodies contains the proper materials for knitting damaged parts together again in this way."

"Then why did Jimmy's Mummy say that God had made his knee better?"

"I expect she said it without thinking. Most likely when she was a little girl her mother told her the same thing. Like most people she was brought up to believe in the God Jimmy told you about—the someone who made everything and is everywhere and can do all sorts of marvellous things, like the giants, fairies and magicians in the stories Mummy and Daddy read to you."

"Doesn't Mrs. Gordon know about cuts being made better by the way the blood works?"

"I'm sure she does, but there was a time when hardly anyone knew such things. Everything was said to be God's doing in those days. When people were ill or got better, when the sun rose, when the rain fell, when a house caught fire, whatever it was there was God behind it. Gradually, however, they learnt better, but by this time they had believed in God for so long that it was a habit they just couldn't get rid of. I think that is why Jimmy's mother is trying to bring up her little boy in the same belief. Most people would agree with her, but you happen to have a daddy and mummy who don't."

"How is it that you and Daddy are different from other people, Mummy?"

"Mainly in not believing things that other people say we must. We are what are known as freethinkers."

"Shall I be a freethinker when I grow up?"

"You can be one long before that, Winnie, if you ask plenty of questions and don't take all the answers you get for the truth. The whole truth and nothing but the truth."

"Not even when you and Daddy tell me things?"

"Not even then, my dear. Now run along and play at something while I lay the table and serve up dinner. By the way, do you think God made Jimmy's knee better?"

"Don't be silly, Mummy!"

P. V. MORRIS.

## ACID DROPS

PROBABLY infected by the name of Mr. Lewis, the "C.T." gives us this gem—religious gem. The editor explains that "the reason why the Incarnation and the Atonement are so difficult for some modern people to understand is because the underlying philosophy is alien to their mind." We take this to mean that if people are prepared to take what happens before the Incarnation, etc., as sober truth, then they will find no difficulty in believing what follows. We agree, heartily. But it reminds us of Voltaire's comment on the beheaded saint who walked thirty paces with his head under his arm.

And that goes for us with regard to the Virgin Mary and the God-begotten child that was sent to her from heaven and which, like a good wife, she presented to her husband. If we could only believe the first heavenly birth, we could swallow a birth of triplets from the same source.

According to the "Church Times" there was a meeting of Youth leaders that "should have done something to dispel the idea, widespread among young people, that Christianity is a system of ethics set in a frame of a sanctified mythology." Of course, if the "Youth leaders" were elderly men the statement may be passed; but if they were young men and young women, say about twenty, with a sprinkling of younger people, then their attitude is most likely to be that of looking at Christianity as a system of mythology set in a frame of misunderstood ethics. Young men and women, and we speak from knowledge, are ceasing to trouble about the mythology, but they are beginning to realise that under cover of ethics the Churches are striving to sail under false colours. They know, too, that there is substantial agreement on ethics; there is no agreement where religion is concerned.

There seems to be more than a hitch in what ought to be the smooth working of the new Education Act. The religious side, even with God's help, looks like a very pretty muddle. Representatives of the teachers, local authorities, and religious bodies have been meeting, and it is now clear (admits a rather chastened writer in the "Church Times") that the "enforcement of a statutory national religion in the schools will raise a crop of difficulties all round." It is good to get this admission, but the word "crop" should really be "tempest." The idea that Christians will amicably meet and agree on religion—of all things—is about as fantastic a proposition as could be imagined. We have said this in these columns over and over again, and now the "Church Times" has to admit we are right. Its solution of the difficulty is that teachers should not teach their own interpretations of the Christian religion, but "teach a religion in substantial agreement with that of the agreed syllabuses." Good—but will teachers and the religious authorities agree on the agreed syllabuses?

The Bishop of Peterborough says that when the war ends we must all work hard and pray hard. Quite clear, so far as it goes, but if we have to choose between the two, which would the Bishop advise us to drop? Or will he explain what is lost when a man works hard but will not pray? Or, yet again, if a man refuses to pray, would the Bishop have him sacked because he is taking up the place of a praying worker? After all, the Government made no distinction in their massing of men and women to fight the war. It did not, for instance, select (as a beginning) only praying men and women to fight the Germans. And no one will deny the courage and skill of Russian soldiers, and they have a Government which publicly, even boastfully, sets God on one side. Besides, we repudiate the idea that Russian human nature is so far superior to ours that they can do what they have without God, while we cannot do it without supernatural help. We emphatically deny that Russians are of an essentially superior texture than we are. We do wish the Bishop would help us to understand the situation. Our columns are open.

The Vicar of the Church of the Ascension, Dartmoor, writes very strongly against Nazi Germany—a thing that requires no great sensitiveness to do, or much courage, in England. But as a Christian priest he believes we are all in the hands of God, and when the war is ended the Vicar will be among the loudest telling the people that we have to thank God for our victory, etc. So he would oblige many if he sat down seriously to explain what God was doing to permit the Hitler gang to come into power; what he has to say in defence for permitting the Hitler gang to pursue their monstrosities; and if he could end this war in the future, why could he not have prevented it in the beginning? All that he, and other Christians, appear to do is to try and drown their own futilities in showers of religious gush and nonsense.

From New Zealand we gather that the clergy are greatly perturbed over the proposal to introduce into the upper schools text-books that will place the scientific view of the world without mixing up with it the fantastical doses of folklore and primitive superstitions on which the Churches live. The books are being denounced as anti-Christian. As we understand the situation, the books are nothing of the kind. They contain views of man and the world which even the more level-headed and better-educated professing Christians accept. They are only anti-Christian when Christian teachings are taught at the same time as being equally true with the discoveries of modern science. It takes a parson to offer children two explanations of the same facts and then tell pupils that they must believe both. And that means, of course, creating a generation of humbugs.

The Rev. A. M. Hay has explained why it is, in spite of daily prayers, individual and masked, the weather in France and Holland has been so persistently against the Allied Forces and, naturally, persistently in favour of Germany. The explanation is that the British do not pay sufficient attention to God's will. One thing that has aroused the anger of God, thinks Mr. Hay, is that we have already arranged for celebrating the downfall of Germany with dancing and revelling instead of everybody marching off to prayers. Of course, there is an exaggeration here.

There will certainly be a well-staged performance of a day of thanksgiving. The King and Queen will be "advised" to attend a thanksgiving service in St. Paul's, leading politicians will be there (by way of advertising), and there will be crowds of people who are always ready to attend a "show" of any kind. What more does anyone want? We shall have done with the tragedy, and we have a harlequinade as a "wind-up."

With unusual courage the B.B.C. recently staged on Irish play that is almost certain to arouse the ire of Roman Catholics. One of the principal characters was a priest, religiously intolerant and brutal in his attitude to those who disobeyed his orders. It was a sample of the way in which people are dealt with when the Church rules the roost. True, there was another priest full of whimsicality and humane feeling, but he may well be taken as an illustration of humanity rising to better levels in spite of the evil influence of religious bigotry. Of course, care was taken openly not to indicate that the listeners were hearing the Church in action, but the implication was there just the same.

The Bishop of Leicester says that the Churches must get into hearts and homes. We fancy the complete idea is not expressed. We fancy the complete counsel would run—"as a preliminary for getting into the pockets of the householder."

The Rev. F. L. Bennett, Vicar of Neston, urged his Diocesan Conference that more stringent rules should be observed in the matter of Sunday worship, noting the small amount of religion held by many of the couples that come to church to be married. On the last question he said: "Week by week in this Church of England we lead to the altar couples who never go to church any other time. Some of the more intelligent of them laugh at a church which provides them with a pretty setting for the wedding." And as regards Confirmation: "The bishop lays his hands on hundreds of young ladies and gentlemen who not only do not become practising church people, but never had any intention of ever becoming practising church people. . . . The Church of England is to-day in a new and serious situation."

Both these statements were published in the "Liverpool Echo," and we do not think that many clergymen will thank the Vicar of Neston for his frankness, particularly when some of the more prominent preachers, particularly those who are from the radio, are telling the world of a great religious revival just round the corner.

But, by way of comment on this unusually truthful parson, we would point out that so far as the marriage is concerned, whether it be in a church or in a register office, religion has no more to do with the marriage than does the colour of the bride's dress or the shape of the bridegroom's nose. Of course, the more intelligent of the people, even in the church, tend to laugh at the ridiculous dress of the parson and his mouthing foolish things as though they were words of unchallengeable philosophy. And the laying-on of hands by the bishop is part of the performance, and when was there a Christian Bishop who did not shine in laying his hands on a good salary and a comfortable job?

That well-known clergyman, Dr. Davidson, of Glasgow Cathedral, warns people that Christianity is a "disturbing, challenging religion." We like the words, although we should differ from Dr. Davidson on the interpretation thereof. For example, we agree that Christianity disturbs people, but the disturbed ones are of the order of the clergy, and all who are dependent upon people seriously taking Christianity in its religious sense. There is not a parson in the country who is not "disturbed" at the way multitudes look at Christianity. Christianity may also be called a challenging religion so far as it is a set of beliefs that is in one form or another challenging Christianity as being essentially, more or less, a mere superstition. Dr. Davidson thinks the Church has been too eager to get adherents on any terms. But that is what preachers are really compelled to do—asking for followers "on any terms" if they will only come to church and pretend to believe that the Gospel story is historically and morally sound.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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### SUGAR PLUMS

WE hope that everyone has not forgotten the flourish of trumpets with which Mr. Churchill announced that he and President Roosevelt had created what came to be called "The Atlantic Charter." The document read well as was to be expected coming from two such old hands. But it was not the reading that mattered so much, but the interpretation of the document. And a careful reading showed that while it offered almost peace to the world, yet a critical reading left one wondering whether it was really worth while. The eight clauses might mean one thing, but then again they might mean another quite opposite. Experience was justified and the Charter was substantially damned before it was tried in practice. Its history reminds one of Polonius, who described politicians as "men who would outwit God." What a politician says and what he means are things that are often very wide apart.

For example. Clause 5 of the Charter arranges social security—these are the words of the document for the working man. We liked the expression. Man is a social animal, that is indisputable. But as a social animal—and not a mere gregarious one—he has a social right to demand his share whatever his society possesses. I need not dwell upon the fact that he must also share society's troubles and misfortunes, because there are those who will take care that that portion of his heritage is secured. But we had some sort of a hope that our political leaders were at last recognising that all that is good and wonderful in any human society is part of man's inheritance, and it is not confined to kings and dukes and the like who have so often turned out to be liabilities instead of assets. Rights in nature at large is fantastic. But "rights" in a social world is one of the basic facts on which society rests. A modern ship is not built by this or that shipbuilding company. Man began to build it when someone discovered that by shaping a bit of wood it would float down a stream. All that happened afterwards were additions. Inventions, whether mechanical instruments or improvements in language they are products of the human race.

So the phrase "Social Security" took our eye and our sense, because both words carried a sociological significance. But, alas, we were dealing with politicians and in many respects they outwit parsons. We could imagine Polonius saying, "I told you so!" The government produced a Bill, and "Social"—which included everyone—became "National" and covered only the "lower" and poorer grades of society, and "Security" became "Insurance," which left us on the level of an ordinary Insurance

Society. It was a grand opportunity lost, the change of terms marked a frustration.

We were not surprised to find that Sir William Beveridge stood out against the change of terms. Of course he was beaten. And as all that was important in his proposals were put forward by Thomas Paine, we can imagine the ghost of Paine leaning over to him and whispering in his ear, "You have done your best, but when I—some century and a half ago—put forward the plans that you have fought to carry into practice, I had your experience. More than that I was slandered as you have never been. I had the whole of the Christian churches and the whole of vested interests fighting me and all slandering me as few other men have been vilified. Never mind, we have both tried to do something. You have benefited from my sufferings. You may yet live to see your ideals in operation."

During recent months we have published various articles and poems by Mr. John Rowland, a young writer who has in the last few years made a name for himself as a promising literary critic from a distinctively Freethought point of view. Readers who have appreciated his writings in these columns and elsewhere may care to know that a new detective novel from his pen has just made its appearance. It is entitled "Grim Souvenir," and it is published at 8s. 6d. by Messrs. Herbert Jenkins. It deals with a murder taking place during a Civil Defence exercise, and the authenticity of the background is assured by the fact that for some three or more years past Mr. Rowland has acted as a member of a Rescue Party in the London area. It is only since his war job with the Ministry of Supply has moved him to the North of England that he has had to give up this C.D. work. The book which he has just published thus provides a double "souvenir" of what he has been doing during the war.

A debate will take place to-day (November 26) in the Co-operative Hall, Adelaide Street, Keighley, when Mr. H. Stewart Wishart will affirm "That the Secularist View of Human Life is Superior to the Christian View" with the Rev. Frank Harwood, Vicar of Oakworth, taking the negative side. Mr. Stewart Wishart is a member of the local N.S.S. Branch which is responsible for arranging the debate, and our case is in good hands. The debate begins at 2.45 p.m., and admission is free.

Very dolefully the Bishop of Worcester says that two things are emerging from the war. "There is a re-interpretation of life on a completely secular basis and the elimination of religion, and the building up a life where God really is unknown." For once we find ourselves in agreement with a Bishop. But the position must be a serious one, for the Churches, for a Bishop to express so much in so few words.

But it would be misleading to lay the present state of religion as due wholly to the war. The influence of *real* religion has been on the down-grade for many, many years. Bit by bit the essential teachings of Christianity have been losing. What human endeavour to stay the rot has been done? Men and women have been punished for attacking Christianity, scientific developments have been opposed to the last moment, the weapons of boycott and misrepresentation has gone as far as it dare, but in spite of all, the hold of religion on the people gets weaker. The Bishop of Worcester is not alone in his opinion of the outlook for Christianity, but all our Bishops are neither courageous enough nor honest enough to tell the truth. The Churches really offer a similar case to that illustrated in the war. The Germans know well enough they cannot win the war, but they hang on hoping that something may turn up. But neither the Churches nor the Germans have the courage to live decently and die with dignity.

Mr. M. Feldman, the chairman of the Leeds Freethought Society, 25, Street Lane, Leeds (Tel. 22829), would like any local lecturers to get in touch with him at the above address. The following dates are open: December 3, 17, 31, and (1945) January 14 and 28, and Mr. Feldman would like to hear from anyone who can help him in his vigorous Freethought campaign.

## AS THINGS REALLY ARE

**"Behind The Spanish Mask."** By Lawrence Dundas, published by Robert Hale, Ltd., 102, Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1; price 5s.

WHENEVER the facts about clerical fascists are presented to the public, the favourite argument of the reactionaries is that the author is not conversant with what he writes. This so-called argument cannot apply in the case of this book. The author has lived in Spain for the greater part of his life and is an authority on his subject. Also he cannot be accused of being a Red which he certainly is not; but he presents the background leading up to the Spanish War in a book of 110 pages (war print) with fairness and clarity. He tells us of the cruel and bloody repression of the Asturia miners by the monarchy and then of the joy when in February, 1936, the electors returned Azana to power with a government of the Popular Front. He says: "The Republicans had saved their Republic and hopes almost dead leaped high again like flames. And then only five months later, the Army and the Church came out into the open and seized the Republic by the throat. This time Spaniards had cause for resentment and they killed."

When the Spanish War was over, the author says: "The Church has now attained over the dead body of a democracy to greater power in Spain than it has possessed since the Inquisition was abolished in 1813. This in the date when the Inquisition was abolished by the Madrid Cortes and marks its end in the Spanish American colonies. In Spain itself, however, the discontinuance lasted barely a year and a half and the Inquisition then resumed a fitful existence until the last execution for heresy took place on the July 26, 1826."

The falsehoods which we were told during the Spanish War and which still persist, that Franco and his followers were deeply religious and engaged in a Holy Crusade are exposed very fully by the author. Here is his summing up: "The mobs killed from hatred which, however unjustifiable, is human, but the rebels killed according to their insistent claims in the name of God and for the benefit of God. Now under no conceivable circumstances can soldiers and civilians claim to kill in the name of God without the approval of their priest, and the Nationalists had this openly expressed. On the day following the Sanjurjo uprising, priests in their pulpits were denouncing the Republicans as the enemies of God. The campaign continued without cease or mincing of words throughout the three years of war—the enemies of God had to be exterminated like weeds in a garden or snakes in the grass. Nor did the Church preach the extermination of Republicans only from the pulpits. It preached extermination in the Press for everyone to read and over the radio for the world to hear. The Chief of Propaganda, the Goebbels of Nationalist Spain, was Fermin Izurdiaga, a learned priest of Navarre . . . This double-edged quality of the propaganda constituted one ingredient that set it apart from the normal; another—even stronger and more noticeable—may be called, for want of a better word, Its Holiness. All Nationalists were incredibly good, all Republicans incredibly evil. The radio, the Press, the orators, and above all, the Church proclaimed loudly and insistently that the Nationalists fought for God and the Republicans for the Devil. There was no half-way house about this phase of the propaganda; no one on the Republican side could enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The clerical fascists who are always so ready to proclaim Franco as a "Gallant Christian gentleman" always try to dodge the ugly fact that, without the aid of the two fascist scoundrels, Hitler and Mussolini, he could never have attained power. Dealing with this subject, Mr. Dundas says: "Though very few seem to realise it even now, Mussolini and Hitler perpetrated in Spain one of the greatest swindles on mankind in history. Whilst they tore and ripped a democracy to pieces

in order to establish a fascist state in its place, they managed to hoodwink a considerable part of the world into believing that this was a fight on behalf of Christian civilisation waged by the elite of a nation against the base. The parts of this gigantic hoax had to be as false and unreal as the whole and so Franco posed as a superman."

The Church must be hard put when ruffians like Hitler, Mussolini and Franco pose as champions. The parts of this book dealing with the German and Italian dominations of Spain show clearly that without fascist aid it would have been impossible to make Spain a fascist country. It is now obvious that the Great War which we are waging at present, began in Spain. The officers and crews of the Italian Navy and Air Force openly boasted: "When we have finished with the Reds it will be England's turn." Clerical fascist papers are continually telling us of the benefits that Franco has conferred upon his country. Here are some of the benefits as outlined by the author of this book: "It can be accepted that typhoid is rampant and that typhus, while not yet epidemic, has appeared, a menace to numberless lives . . . widespread corruption has converted this ruling into a tragic farce. Men and women collapse in the streets from starvation and children with rickety limbs abound, but first class restaurants, hotels and clubs have plenty of food and so has the Black Market which is not the market of the poor or even of the moderately well-to-do. The rich do not go hungry and under this category must be included the clergy and religious orders, female as well as male, who form the wealthy and powerful church."

The story of the Spanish prisons in which over a million wretched prisoners were herded without proper food or decent sanitation—the daily shooting of prisoners all go to show that, as far as brutality is concerned, Franco had nothing to learn from Hitler and Mussolini.

Mr. Dundas ends his book with the following words: "The Spanish Church played a leading part in the rebellion that resulted in Spain and Franco has been blessed by the Pope for his fight on behalf of Christianity; and some of the political interests abroad which supported Franco during the war years, give small evidence that their sympathies have changed."

This book was written in 1943—now let us examine the situation to-day—On Saturday, November 4, 1944, Franco gave his first interview authorised for publication since he assumed power in 1939, to Mr. A. L. Bradford, of the British United Press. Franco said that Spain could never ally herself with any country not guided by the principles of Catholicism. He allied himself with Germany and surely even the most zealous clerical fascist could hardly say that the principles of Nazism are those of Catholicism. He accepted Germany and Italy as allies and wears on his breast the highest decorations that Mussolini and Hitler could bestow. He praises himself for having maintained neutrality. With him the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. His country was too unsettled and too bankrupt to declare war on the Allies. Franco says: "For eight years our regime has proclaimed the basic principles of its ideology—God, Country, Justice." Well, even the Devil was able to quote scripture.

Dealing with the Spanish volunteers of the Blue Division who fought against Russia, he says that their presence involved no idea of conquest or passion against any country, but rather a definite anti-communist purpose. This rat says also: "When the Spanish government learned that the presence of the volunteers might affect our relations with Allied countries, it ordered those volunteers to return to Spain." Here are two definite lies. The Spanish Legion returned because they got such a frightful mauling from the Russians and because Franco saw that the Germans themselves were getting badly beaten. And now this 'creature' claims that neutral countries, such as Spain must take part in the Peace Treaty. The man who talks



so glibly of 'God, Country and Justice' is the same Franco who congratulated and decorated German and Italian airmen after devastating raids on his own people in which thousands of Spanish men, women and children were killed.

Mr. Chapman Cohen has described fascism as breeding tyrants at the top, cowards at the bottom and hypocrites in between. The tyrant has now become a damned hypocrite.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

(Reprinted from the "English Review" for March, 1913)

## GEORGE MEREDITH: FREETHINKER

EMERSON said that Shakespeare was the only biographer of Shakespeare. With that wise epigram he scattered the cloud of dryasdust foolery about the "problem" of the authorship of the plays and the "biographical" value of the sonnets. Shakespeare reveals himself to the Shakespeare (such as it is) within us. It is his mind, his genius, with which we come into contact. All else is commonplace fact that fits millions more as well as himself. There was nothing in the way in which he put on his boots, or took off his hat, or ate his food, or drank his wine, or bowed to a lady, or shook hands with a friend, to indicate that he had written "Hamlet." If he summoned a defaulting debtor it does not follow that he was avaricious. We do not know all the circumstances of the case as he did. But we do know that avarice could never have been the vice of the author of "Timon of Athens." The life of a man of action must be told to posterity. The life of a poet is only to be told by himself. His real life—his character and his intellect, which are both included in his genius—is to be found in his writings. It is there that we find Shakespeare, and by the same law it is in his writings that we must find George Meredith. "Our books contain the best of us," was his own reply to a would-be interviewer. That was all he held that the public had a right to know—that and the fact "that the writer is reputedly a good citizen." Thus there is no official biography of Meredith to be published, an announcement which some have hailed with considerable pleasure. A collection of his letters, filling more than six hundred pages, has been thought by the family sufficient in the biographical direction. But it will be a great disappointment to readers in expectation of intimate disclosures. There may, of course, be letters that would please them more which are not included in this collection. But also there may not be such letters. Meredith did not wear his heart upon his sleeve; and, after all, it is doubtful whether his letters would ever be really more revelatory than his writings. An author, pen in hand, is strictly alone with each of his unknown readers, whose personalities, so to speak, all melt into one impersonal personality; but a letter writer has particular relationships with every one of his correspondents, and adapts himself to these, often quite unconsciously, saying perhaps more than he essentially means in one case, and perhaps less in another; and there is always the ghost of the third person standing behind his chair.

One thing, however, is established by Meredith's letters; his style was not artificial, but the material expression of his individuality.

Competent readers of Meredith did not need any assurance as to his style. Neither did they need any assurance as to some other things. Meredith's views on most matters from supernaturalism and immortality to Home Rule and Woman Suffrage, were all stated, or suggested, or hinted, in his novels, and still more so in his poems. The latter contain—and, indeed, are—his deliberate message to the world. He cared far

more for his poetry than for his prose. He published volume after volume of verse at his own expense. The British public never accepted him as a poet to the very last, though they had accepted him (after some fifty years!) as a novelist. They drank too much of what he called "Tennyson's green tea" for the good of their stomachs and palates. Meredith gave his opinion of this matter very racily in his first letter to me as far back as 1878:—

"As to my poems, I have lost the ardour for publishing them; perhaps in a year or two they may appear; I am well content to remain unpublished while the poems of "B. V." (James Thomson) are withheld. To him, as to me, the conditions of sale, which frown on collections of verse not offering themselves as appropriate gift-books for the innumerable nuptial curate and his bride, are, I fear, adverse. Poetry in England is required to have a function of a practical kind, and to exercise it."

With regard to his poetry, Meredith had given the matter up. He did not even ask, with Thackeray, "When shall we get hold of the long ear of this dear public?" Not until the end of his life did his volumes of verse begin to pay their way. He ceased sending copies to the reviewers. This is referred to again and again in the Letters. Swinburne's magnificent praise of "Modern Love" in 1862 does not appear to have appreciably quickened the slow current of Meredith's popularity. Twenty-one years elapsed before his next volume of verse appeared. No doubt that was his great productive period as a novelist, but that the author of such a splendid and original poem as "Modern Love" should wait so many years for his next bow to the public seems to demand a more special explanation. It was partly due to Meredith's originality. He was a new poet, with new matter, and a new style. The professional critics did not know what to make of the phenomenon. Moreover, it was obvious even to them, for they could read, that certain collocations of words which were intelligible in the midst of unintelligibility showed that this puzzling poet was plainly unorthodox. Clearly it was a case for silence, if not for abuse; though abuse was not easy when it was not certain that the poet was understood. Meredith himself said, in a letter to Mr. Gosse in 1889, that "Richard Feverel" was "denounced over the country by clergymen, at book-clubs, and it fell dead." "Martin's Puzzle," a poem of 1864, included in the 1883 volume, frightened Smith of the "Cornhill," who, while personally admiring it, was "compelled to say he thinks it would offend many of his readers, and must therefore beg to, etc." Meredith paid the price of being in advance of his time, with all that it implies of seriousness, strenuousness, and sincerity. He paid the price most of all in regard to his scepticism. He affronted the fashionable faith, and the fashionable faith never forgives. It took him a long time to learn this, but he did learn it at last, and his progress towards its recognition is singularly interesting.

Strange as it may appear, Meredith is still of some use to the champions of orthodoxy. They have already begun to quote passages from his earlier letters in tribute to Christianity. The dishonesty of the thing is appalling, but they are never disturbed by that consideration. The truth is that Meredith may be quoted for everything he left behind him in the course of his mental development. He passed through all the stages of emancipation, from evangelical Christianity to pure Humanism—where he remained; and his letters, like his writings, take a tone from each halting-place. The very first letter in this collection is full of a snuffing piety which he contracted at a Moravian school in Germany. There is not a trace of Meredith in it—but he was only sixteen. What a change five years later! He was then engaged on "Richard

Feveler"—after an unhappy marriage. Presently he is checking the Christian zeal of Captain Maxse, of all men, in this fashion:—

"What you say about Christianity arresting sensualism is very well; but the Essenian parentage of Christianity was simply asceticism. Hitherto human nature has marched through the conflict of extremes. With the general growth of reason it will be possible to choose a path midway. Paganism no doubt deserved the ascetic reproof; but Christianity failed to supply much that it destroyed."

Afterwards he finds that Maxse goes too fast for him. He reminds the Radical captain—his lifelong personal friend and the hero of "Beauchamp's Career"—that "Christianity will always be one of the great chapters in the History of Humanity," and ought not to be exploded in shreds to the wind. Besides, it was doubtful, or rather *not* doubtful, if "men's minds are strong enough, or their sense of virtue secure, to escape from the tutelage of superstition in one form or another just yet." Christianity was an advance on Paganism as monotheistic. "And the nearer," he says, "we get to a general belief in the abstract Deity—*i.e.*, the more and more abstract—the nearer are men to a comprehension of the principles (morality, virtue, etc.), than which we require nothing further to govern us."

That is how superior persons talk. Meredith had to pass through even that stage. He knew next to nothing of the people then. But he presently goes to hear Bradlaugh. Towards the end of 1869 he paid a visit to "Iconoclast's" blasphemy shop. Writing to John Morley, he said:—

"Did I tell you that Fred and I went to sit under Bradlaugh one evening. The man is neither to be laughed nor sneered down, nor trampled. He will be a powerful speaker. I did my best to make Greenwood understand that. It was really pleasant to hear those things spoken which the parsonry provoke."

There is another reference to Bradlaugh a few pages further on:—

"You see how they have dealt with Bradlaugh. I spoke to Greenwood about him, insisting that he was a man of power, and was not to be sneered down; and that on the whole he said certain things comforting to hear by one suffering from Simon Peter."

When the real "Bradlaugh Question" came before Parliament and the country, after 1880, Meredith was naturally much interested, and he carefully noted the tactics of the most eager opponents of the right of an Atheist to take the seat to which he had been elected in the House of Commons. Bradlaugh is not mentioned in the following extract, but the reference can only be to the really great speech in which Gladstone supported the Affirmation Bill:—

"There was real spiritual grandeur in Gladstone's speech. But it will not move the English, who will bawl off it exultingly after his death, when they fancy it casts a beam of splendour upon them. Decade doses of the same are required for such blocks to be worn by it. The Government will be defeated. No one gets up in the House to say that the majority of petitions against comes of the active shepherding of an organised clergy, ever sworn to support impediments."

It will be observed that, as the years rolled by, Meredith grew more tired and sick of the clergy; and I must be allowed to say that this is a most important point. It shows that his feelings, as well as his intellect, were becoming enlisted in the cause of Freethought.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued)

## FOR WHAT?

### A True Story. By the Village Grocer

IT was near Christmas, 1914, and I had a few friends around the table talking about the war and things in general. Things were not very bright in Flanders, and one of our party, Frank Rush, said jokingly "I'll have to join up and get this business over." We of course all laughed as he was barely nineteen years of age, a fine lad and a good boy, and what a Mother's boy.

He had two younger sisters and a baby brother about a year old, a happy and contented family. Mother was a bit comfortable, having inherited some money. Father had a good job and the kids were getting a rather decent education, but as he said Old England is worth fighting for, and I'll do my bit.

Nobody discouraged him, and conscription had not then come into force. We parted the best of pals, but Frank was the only one who joined up. The others were reserved men including myself.

Poor Frank a few weeks afterwards came home on leave, he was awfully cut-up about the manner in which he was being treated in the Army. He said it was "Drill, peeling spuds, drill, peeling spuds," day in and day out. He had had some experience as a cook having had a couple of trips to sea in the Galley, and he mentioned that when joining up. As he said, he wanted to learn to fight.

Apparently he did learn to fight for a few months after he was put in the Artillery, and real pleased he was, a little later transferred to France and was doing some fighting. He came home and told us all that he liked the life, but he didn't feel comfortable killing other men who like himself, were neither the cause of the war, or wanted it, or knew why they were fighting, but he said "If I don't kill them they will eventually kill me" and that's what they did.

Poor Frank, 20 years of age, just when he should have been enjoying life he died a hero's death, so the note from his Officer to his Mother read, and of course his reward was a hero's grave. Just a sheet and a hole in the ground somewhere, with a poor Mother's memory, every year a reminder put in the local paper. That was Frank, a good woman bore him, good parents brought him up, a good hearted boy without doubt going to be a fine man. Cut off.

It is 1939. England has again declared war on Germany, Frank's baby brother Charles, a fine man about 26 years of age, has a good job, fine home with his parent, single, he would not marry while his Mother lived, Father having died of practically a broken heart, began to think. He had heard of his brother Frank, but did not remember him, decided to join the Army. He might have had a commission had he wanted to, but would not pull the strings. He told me he wanted to be a man and anything he got in the way of promotion he would earn.

He went before the Medical Board and was turned down owing to a serious rupture, that he was hardly aware of.

Coming home he talked to his Mother about it and they could not understand it, he decided to have it attended to and went into a hospital to undergo a rather serious operation so that he could join up.

The operation was successful, but it meant the losing of his manhood. He knew that and decided before the operation. He passed the Medical Board (perhaps they were not so strict on this occasion), and got into a decent regiment. He was stationed in several places in England, Ireland and Wales, and was working himself into a frenzy because he was not at the war, fighting. He was home pretty frequently and spent all his time with his Mother. She had been bombed out of one district and was living in two rooms in another. Charlie told her not to worry, he would soon alter things when the war was over. And he meant it, he was one of the boys who had decided that things

at home would improve when the war was over, for he pointed out to me some surface shelters that had been built in a main road and said, "You know what they are for I suppose?" I replied "Yes, they are air-raid shelters." "Bosh," he said, "when the boys come home and they decide to have their share of this world's goods those places will be handy to put the troublesome ones into when the fighting begins."

I smiled, maybe he was right, he couldn't imagine they were built at a big expense to save the lives and limbs of the poor people.

Well Charlie eventually got to the Far East and after three years of fighting, mud, and jungle, lice and other creeping things, got severely wounded. In hospital several weeks, he got better and was sent up the line again, this time he got killed. I feel that I should have said "murdered," for Charlie, poor devil, never did a soul any harm, one of the cleanest men on earth, lived for his Mother, deserved more life than he got. Perhaps he will see the better life that he dreamed of and fought for, perhaps he won't. Personally, I don't think he will. His Mother absolutely broken in heart and spirit, says he will meet his brother. Will he? I doubt it. He never knew him and I don't think he will ever see his Mother. The God who ordains these things, if there is one, is at present doing some funny things; he is allowing the Hitler crowd to live, and causing the death of the best of our manhood and breaking the hearts of the finest women the world has ever known. Why was Mrs. Rush born? Why did she have two sons? Why did they ever live?

One of your writers says that a man's God is his Conscience. I believe that to be right. To do good and to follow your conscience is the right religion, but it does not alter the query: "Why were those boys born?" "Why did they die?"

FOR WHAT?

F. G. REEVES.

#### A "REVISED VERSION"

AT the recent meeting of the Ministers' Institute at Great Hucklow, one of the speakers expressed the view that if the present tendency towards naturalism and humanism in religion were to continue much further, it would become logically necessary to revise our hymnals and liturgical services in such a fashion as to make them a consistent expression of the new ideas. He submitted a "revised version" of the Lord's Prayer which he had prepared, and the view was afterwards expressed that it might be given wider publicity. The speaker in question would ask to be relieved of any charge of irreverence in the matter. He was serious in his contention that some of the current trends in liberal religion would speedily render obsolete much of our traditional phraseology. Informed readers will readily perceive that his implied criticism, though no doubt somewhat facetious, is far from being frivolous, and it is hoped they will judge his composition accordingly.

Our hypothetical Father, who art in our cosmic consciousness,

Rationalised by thy name;

Thy immanent power evolve,

Thy will be subjectively felt, as it is objectified in Nature. Give us this day our daily bread.

And liberate our complexes, as we psycho-analyse those of others;

And lead us not into anthropomorphism,

But deliver us from metaphysics,

For thine is the universal Urge, the monistic Unity, the mystical Oomph,

For three score years and ten,

And then,

Amen!

C. H.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### "OATHS AND AFFIRMATIONS."

SIR,—I should be happy to leave Mr. Irving with his "last words" on this subject but for the fact that he now asks: "Suppose that such instruction (regarding evidence) were put by the Clerk of the Court in the form of a question, to which the witness responded with a simple 'Yes.' How could this make any difference?"

It couldn't, and wouldn't. Such a method would satisfy on the only point that matters for the simple "Yes" would form the promise upon which (if it be broken) proceedings for breach might be taken. Methinks Mr. Irving protesteth too much. I never asked for elocutionary attestation to be retained, but merely the declaration. His suggestion that I did so seems to cover up a growing awareness on his part of the value of the real point of my arguments, and I am glad if that be so. Such a declaration as he himself now proposes would amply satisfy, for it is the promise that counts, not the trimmings.

Nor have I ever kidded myself that declarations turn liars into truthful people. To suggest that is to distort what I said. The value of the declaration lies mainly in its restrictive effect upon the circumstances in which one may be proceeded against.

Mr. Irving now demurs to "truth for truth's sake." Again, he must have been thinking things over, for it was he, not I, who introduced this absurd phrase. I merely challenged it as a Deterministic expression. Further, with all respect to Mr. Irving's good work for Freethought, he must also admit that he introduced the phrase, "It is bound to come," which merited my remarks about sitting pretty.—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.

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

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Professor G. E. G. CATLIN, M.A., Ph.D.: Religious Guides (2) Berdyaev. Irrationalism in Religion.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street).—Sunday, 3.30 p.m., Mr. J. NICHOLAS: "The Aims and Objects of the N.S.S."

Blyth (Forster Senior Schools, Blyth).—Wednesday, November 29; 6.30 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. J. G. DODGSON: "Social Credit."

Keighley Branch N.S.S. (Co-Operative Assembly Hall, Keighley).—Sunday, 2.45 p.m., Debate: "That the Secularist View of Human Life is superior to the Christian." Affirmative, H. WISHART; Negative, Rev. Frank HARWOOD.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. B. MILLET: "The British Constitution."

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Cafe, Old Arcade, Newcastle).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

New Kyo (Miners' Hall, New Kyo).—Tuesday, November 28; 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

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