

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Thanksgiving Day in Blinkers

NOVEMBER 23 is a great day for Americans in all parts of the world. They return thanks to God for having released them from the rule of this country. At home and abroad United States citizens never forget that date, and in this country many British citizens step in to witness—sometimes actually to take part in—the ceremony. This year the proceedings took on rather a different character. It was even more English than American; and if that is an indication of blending still more strongly the mixture of about a dozen different nationalities it will be one of the best Thanksgiving Days that has occurred. We may even get rid of much foolish talk about "race," and also of "blood," which is actually more stupid than talks about races. It might be an indication of real world peace.

This year's ceremony was held in the great Albert Hall. Had the building been twice the size it would still have been crammed. Prominent men and women were there in crowds, ostensibly to congratulate a great people who broke away from the rule of King George III—one of a very bad bunch. It was a great occasion: great for many because of the size of the gathering; for others because a great many nobodys would be in the same building and perhaps rub shoulders with one or two somebodies; and some—probably the smaller number—because they felt they were taking part in a ceremony that might bring us nearer to a world peace.

Our own Prime Minister appears to have been the principal character present—at any rate, the principal speaker; but it is regrettable that he should have stressed as the dominating quality of the U.S.A. that it is now "the greatest military and naval power" in the world. In the future, when historians cease to spend so much time and energy upon comparatively unimportant matters, and settle down to a real study and understanding of the springs of human motive, such praise as that of the American armaments may be taken as anything but complimentary. Brotherly associations, the historian may decide, must be built upon a more solid basis than the degree to which a people may be capable of bombing from the skies or cannonading on the land. Our critical students of the future may decide that much better use may be made of human strength and human wisdom and goodwill. The old saw that it takes two to make a quarrel has its modicum of good sense.

We have never attended a thanksgiving service and did not attend this one. One knows what the speakers will say, and one would hardly reap wisdom by attending. Our attention to this service or meeting, whichever description best fits the ceremony, was due to an article by Mr. Michael Foot—a bonnie fighter in his way—in the "Daily Herald" two days before the demonstration. I was

interested in what he said, and also because of what he did not say. It appears that there was carried out, on a programme, a kind of ballad depicting the struggle of the American against the British Government. In the first stage a question was asked, Did they believe in liberty in those days? And the reply came:—

"Nobody who was anybody believed it.  
Everybody who was anybody,  
They doubted it.  
Nobody had faith.  
Nobody."

This was followed up with a great deal of assurance that the revolutionists will finally triumph, but with more revolts, more despair and more triumphs. But the thanksgiving gathering was to offer praise to God for the original aid given which brought to life the United States of America. There would have been here a splendid chance for Mr. Churchill. He might have pleaded that, if it was bad English government that led to the revolution, at least it provided one man who at a critical moment saved the American Army from despair with his stirring, "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the shrunken patriot will in this crisis shrink from the service of his country, but he who stands for it now deserves the love and thanks of men and women. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered." Churchill might have said with a smile that without the intervention of a newly arrived Englishman the army of civilians might have faded away and America would have continued as one of the British colonies. But one must remember that politics is politics, and its ethics is not to be flouted by considerations of justice to a very great Englishman who died a long time ago.

I had almost forgotten to give the name of this great Englishman. His name was Thomas Paine, and among other political and religious offences he published first a book, "The Rights of Man"—one of the really great books of the time, and which the home Government of his day hated for its simple language demanding justice for all. But Paine found that if one had to get the Rights of Man established he would have to deal with the superstition that was blinding the people. So he wrote another great book, "The Age of Reason." It exposed the nature of the Bible in a manner that the simplest mind could follow and the highest intellect could appreciate and admire. Paine left Europe for America just before the people rose against the tyranny of the English Government, and his pen played a decisive part at a time when the American settlers were losing heart, and even Washington was losing heart. It was "The Crisis" that urged the revolutionists to final victory. But his greatness ran beyond this. I will leave Mr. Foot to sum up the quality of Paine by his retailing not of all Paine's work, but a part:—

"On January 13, 1777, a copy of a paper called 'The Crisis' appeared in Philadelphia, and in it were

these words, containing a phrase which had never been heard before, 'The United States of America will sound as pompously in the world or in history as the Kingdom of Great Britain.'

"Tom Paine, who wrote them, was an Englishman who had been dismissed from his job as an Excise man for writing a pamphlet agitating for higher wages. He crossed the Atlantic a penniless failure, yet two years later, when Washington thought the game was 'pretty well up,' it was his pen which put new fervour into Washington's bedraggled armies.

"An outcast from England, he was one of the founders of Free America. Returning to his own countrymen to do them an equal service, he had his books burned by the hangman in the streets. He went to France during her revolution and was given the key of the Bastille to take as a present to Washington.

"He was one of the first citizens of the world. He advocated international arbitration a hundred and fifty years before the League of Nations was thought of; he demanded the abolition of slavery a hundred years before Lincoln's proclamation; he prepared a plan for family allowances, old age pensions, maternity benefits and compulsory education nearly two hundred years before Sir William Beveridge was elected for Berwick. . . . He had a fine contempt for the sophistries of authority, and when . . . Britain wishes to pay a tribute to our allies across the Atlantic it is an anthem inspired by his faith which is selected for Thanksgiving Day, and not the dirge of cynicism chanted by Lord North and the younger Pitt, who condemned him as a rebel. . . . He may be properly regarded as the greatest Englishman of his century.

"But his name does not figure so prominently in the history books on both sides of the Atlantic. The authorities in Britain would still like our school-children to believe that he was a mere eccentric, while a century after his death in America Theodore Roosevelt was still denouncing him as 'a dirty little Atheist.' To-day amends are made at last. . . . He has had to wait for a long while, but what rebel could wish for a more remarkable monument than the congregation of the most elegant doubters in London, where he was spurned, to acknowledge, however unconsciously, his pre-eminent achievements and hail in rapturous song the glory of his gospel. It is a matchless moment in the long annals of sophisticated humbug, and if a peal of thunderous laughter should suddenly shatter the harmony of the gathering on . . . it will be the ghost of old Tom Paine splitting his sides."

"The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." Strictly, Shakespeare was wrong. Buddha was nearer the truth when he taught that be a man's deeds good or bad consequences follow actions and form an inextinguishable part of that stream of events we know as history. Poor Paine did little evil, and any he did might have been forgiven and forgotten in view of his great services to humanity. But he committed two unforgivable sins. He wrote the "Rights of Man," a tremendous plea for justice and the dignity of humanity which could not exist while the larger part were being treated as mere chattels. Then he discovered that to secure

the dignity of man one had to create a preliminary step, and he produced the "Age of Reason." There was nothing very new in what he had to say; but it was written for the people, and in that flawless simplicity that made his writing one which opened a new stage in English literature. Had it been in Latin, or even in the ponderous style that was then characteristic of much religious writing, that book might have had its day and then passed into oblivion. But it was written for the people, and it became, first, a criminal offence to sell it and finally a synonym of hope to all who suffered from the mis-education of the day. These were the two "crimes" that Paine committed, and even to-day his "crime" has not been forgiven. No man was ever slandered as was Paine; no man ever brought around his books a finer band of men and women who one after another was thrown into Christian prisons for seeking the truth.

But prison could not silence either Paine or his followers. While he lived he fought. Even in America he knew what it was to live in poverty and to suffer all the slanders of a malignant religious creed. In England he escaped imprisonment by leaving the country. To bully people into not reading Paine ultimately failed. To indulge in controversy only advertised Paine's opinions. A more cunning plan — regularly practised where religion is concerned — was adopted. It became a rule to ignore him in any serious books. True that men such as G. G. Trevelyan have paid him high tribute; and we have had for over fifty years the great and authoritative "life" by Moncure Conway. But in the main Paine is still ignored. Green, who scandalised "respectable" folk by writing "A Short History of the English People" — about three-quarters of a century ago — does not mention Paine's name save to quote Burke as saying "Paine is no fool." (Burke had crossed swords with Paine and had felt the sting of the lash.) H. L. Fisher — a Minister of Education — in the space of 1,200 pages of history could not find time or space to mention Paine, although he does discuss the American Revolution — a case of "Shylock" with the Jew left out. Colonel Ingersoll once laughingly said when he was asked what a finely bound copy of the "Age of Reason" cost him, "The Governorship of Illinois." But there were hundreds who in this country paid in terms of imprisonment for the ownership of Paine's books.

But no power on earth can blot out Thomas Paine. Even though his very name passed out of the knowledge of men, his work will live wherever truth is valued and real humanity honoured. Thomas Paine has become part of that stream of tendency for good that affects every generation and that forms part of what we call the history of humanity. The man who in three countries challenged the insolence and tyranny of kings and religious sects, whose nature rose above and beyond the boundaries of sect, of colour and of creed; the man who before Tennyson dreamed of a parliament of man and a parliament of the world; the man who in his lifetime served as an inspiration to multitudes and a rallying ground for those who lived in darkness: that man must live on in the larger liberty he helped to create. He cannot die in even the bloodstained fury that is all around us. Many have coined formulas to hide themselves from themselves. Paine's declaration of faith, "The world is my country, to do good my religion," was the bare expression of the real man.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE AMERICAN SCENE

CHARLES and Mary Beard's "America in Midpassage" has now been supplemented by their "Rise of American Civilisation." This monumental performance is now available with its two volumes running to 1,660 closely printed pages, bound in one. (Jonathan Cape, 1944, 30s.).

This important historical study is conducted on somewhat novel lines. The evolution of the United States is traced almost entirely to social and economic causes and the influences of outstanding personalities play a very subordinate part. Indeed, the Beards' claim that the causes that led to the rise, progress and ultimate decline of all past civilisations were virtually those still in operation in all modern States.

The economic, religious and social factors that preceded the American War of Independence, and those that precipitated the later Civil War in the sixties of last century, are realistically portrayed. In this struggle between North and South the liberation of the slave is shown to have been little more than a pretext. The North was determined to sustain its system of protection for its manufactured articles, while the Southern Slave States needed Free Trade for the export of their cotton, tobacco and other crops in exchange for the cheap manufactured goods which they imported very largely from England. In the work under review the rise of capitalism and its astounding developments, the advent and growth of Labour Unions, as well as the inception and progress of science, art and literature are all discussed in detail. An illuminating chapter portrays the birth pangs of the young Republic when its independence had been acknowledged by the British Crown. The sullen Puritanism which had so long saddened New England was substantially weakened. Instead of brooding over their prospects in the next world, men more and more concentrated their minds on the betterment of their condition in this.

In addition to their British heritage the Americans embraced ideas and sentiments from many other sources. Their Constitution was defined in purely secular terms as Lord Acton noted half a century ago. As the Beards observe: "Religious qualifications for voting and office-holding, which appeared in the contemporary state constitutions with such profusion, found no place whatever in the federal Constitution. Its preamble did not invoke the blessing of Almighty God . . . And the First Amendment added by the radicals in 1791 declared that 'Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.' In dealing with Tripoli, President Washington allowed it to be squarely stated that 'the government of the United States is not in any sense founded upon the Christian religion.'"

The era of enlightenment in France pervaded America and the writings of Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet and other sceptics, especially Rousseau, were eagerly perused. Moreover, the scientific successors of Bacon and Descartes; such men as Galvani, Lavoisier, Volta, Priestley and Black, immensely influenced the minds of Americans. Then there were great British inventors, Watt, Arkwright, Crompton, among others who rendered the Industrial Revolution possible, while in 1765 Hutton laid the firm foundations of modern geology which in the hands of Lyell later prepared the way for the acceptance of Darwin's and Spencer's even more revolutionary doctrines.

Even before the Declaration of Independence, there must have been a wide reading public in America. The Beards intimate: "Although no census of literacy was ever taken in the colonial age there was abundant collateral evidence to support Franklin's contention that a very large proportion of the American people could read and write. It was a fact of no small portent, that 100,000 copies of Thomas Paine's first pamphlet calling for independence were sold while the issue was fresh from the Press.

The work of the schools, tutors, libraries, printers and booksellers was widely supplemented by that of patient fathers and mothers who pored with their children over primers and spelling books."

When referring to Paine's influence our historians remark: "Whatever may be said of his shortcomings and his wayward spirit—Theodore Roosevelt, with characteristic impatience and a woeful disregard for exactness called him 'a dirty little atheist'—Paine's services to the Revolution were beyond calculation. For this we have the evidence of men so far apart in their general views as Washington and Jefferson."

Owing to the impact of rationalising forces liberated by the Revolution, religious orthodoxy was severely shaken in intellectual circles. Unitarianism gained ground and open Deism became fashionable. When the struggle for independence began, nearly all its prominent supporters were anti-Trinitarians or unbelievers in revelation. "It was not Cotton Mather's God," aver the Beards, "to whom the authors of the Declaration of Independence appealed, it was to 'Nature's God.'" The intellect of the States had cast aside the bonds of Calvinism, as well as those of less malignant creeds.

Freethought was, however, confronted by a Methodist invasion of America. John Wesley dispatched Francis Asbury to the States to convert the people to his special form of Christianity and for forty-four years this untiring revivalist conducted an intensive campaign. His methods were extremely sensational. We gather that: "After the fashion of Jonathan Edwards, who set an awful example, Asbury at one moment frightened his flock by lurid pictures of hell and the next thrilled it by visions of joy in heaven."

Ultimately some 300,000 converts were claimed and thousands of ordained clergymen appointed. John and Charles Wesley, Whitefield and others, laboured in the cause, but there were dissensions within the movement. "John Wesley," observe the Beards, "after betraying a strong indiscretion in an affair of the heart 'shook the dust of Georgia off his feet' in time to escape the consequences of a suit filed by the husband of the lady in the case."

There were further troubles when the converts called for rum and the use of slave labour. So the Methodist trustees were constrained to grant these requests. Both Whitefield and Habersham pleaded that slavery led to conversion and was therefore justified. Moreover, it was asserted that "if you take slaves in faith and with the intent of conducting them to Christ, the action will not be a sin, but may prove a benediction."

Despite the Methodist reaction, however, and its success among the emotional and less cultured section of the people, scientific progress was maintained. The researches of Franklin were continued for nearly forty years by Benjamin Rush after the former philosopher had departed this life, and during this time Rush made important contributions to medical science.

Driven from England by persecution, Dr. Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen, resumed his chemical inquiries in Pennsylvania where he died in 1804. Thomas Cooper, another refugee varied his scientific studies with animated discussions with the clericals concerning the authenticity of Biblical records and relentless criticism of the American politicians. As the Beards mordantly note: "Arrested and fined under the Sedition Act of a New World after he had fled from one in the Old, driven out of Virginia University by religious critics, he preached science in Carolina College, until he was finally forced into retirement by his clerical foes."

Yet, humanism was steadily advancing and Bowditch, the mathematician, published the American Practical Navigator and translated Laplace's *Mécanique céleste* into English. Dr. Silliman achieved distinction as a chemist and Audubon became the greatest ornithologist of the age, while Rufinesque antici-

## ACID DROPS

It is interesting to note that the editor of the "Church Times" writing approvingly of some of the honours paid to several of our fighting generals remarks: "The men who do the work should get the honours—as in Russia." Things have really changed since almost all the leading churchmen in this country were telling us that Godless Russia must be kept at arms' length by all right-minded Christians. Now it is held up as a model for us to consider.

All that is good, but we want to raise a very strong protest against those preachers who are—unconsciously—placing the English people as lower than Russians. For the constant whine of the preacher is that we Britishers can do nothing without the help of God. Russian men and women can get on without howling to high heaven that we are miserable sinners and nothing short of a miracle will make us better. We object to this implied superiority of the Russian peoples, and insist that what Russia can do without God, we can do, if we will only try. It is time that British people took themselves at their proper value.

The Belfast Protestant Action Society demands "A Protestant Government for a Protestant people." And, in the other half of Ireland a Catholic Government is called for by a Catholic people. We wonder whether these are the first fruits of a world war? Presently we shall hear the demand for a Lunatic Government for a lunatic people. Why not?

Archbishop McGrath is alarmed, or pretends to be alarmed. And his feigned alarm is exhibited because it is thought that we may see the Vatican out of the Peace Conference that must come when our leading politicians decide. If our own Government has any grit and honesty left in it when the war is over it should end this utterly absurd and mischievous harlequinade of treating the Vatican as a nation. It might as well count Cornwall as a separate country because its people regard all others in England as foreigners. The Vatican is the head of a body of religious believers and nothing else, and should be treated as such. If Europe is to have a living peace, it must shut out the Secular Parliament representatives of any particular religious group.

One is struck with wonder to learn that when France was overrun by Germany the Pope announced that if the French people placed their faith in the Church God would see that they conquered "at the end of the trial." The artfulness of the deliverance is very striking. Some day—of course no date was given—the war will come to an end, and "some day" France will recover, and whenever it comes it will be due to God. But in that case, why, in the name of God's great partner, the Devil, did not God prevent the Germans overrunning France? When people can be gulled by such tom-foolery one wonders whether it is worth while saving either France or any other country. The chief justification is, we suppose, that all are not fools, and hopes that in spite of the Christian and other churches common sense will gradually take the upper hand.

We are all familiar with the large proportion of men who have been educated in our "Public Schools" (so-called, because they are far more private than public), who hold offices, usually well paid ones, under the Government. This is not because they show superior mental ability, and no one has openly claimed that this is the case. It is just part and parcel of our very curious Democracy. But it seems that even where religion is concerned its religious standing leaves much to be desired—by more critical Christians. For example: Mr. H. I. Clutterbuck writes to the "Church Times," complaining that the public school men who have come under his notice in the Armed Forces and who attended religious services confessed they did so because it was the "decent thing to do," but they showed no understanding of religion, "few of them had any definite ideas about their faith." If we were religious we should advise Christian leaders to remain quiet. After all, the Churches have never taught that men were to be saved by understanding religion, the important thing is to believe in it. And many have given up their faith altogether by not even trying to understand it.

Now that Catholics will have to pay at least part of the costs of maintaining Catholic teachers to teach Catholic children in Catholic schools, most Catholic parents are beginning to find out that there are not enough Catholic-trained teachers to go round; and also that a good many of those who are trained prefer to teach in a council school as there is precious little hope of advancement in purely Catholic schools. We presume this is because priests rule the roost with a pretty firm, if not in the least divine, hand. The "Universe" is now airing some of the grievances of these teachers and one Catholic gentleman, a retired M.R.S.T., who has been 40 years a teacher, has let himself go in no uncertain manner. He says: "Without hesitation, except for an honourable minority, Catholic managers impose an intolerable burden of extraneous work upon teachers," and that they "have an interest in freezing a competing market against Catholic teachers." Another delightful habit of Catholic managers is that they "spend an undue time in the schools talking to the scholars during lessons, often flouting the teachers' lawful authority and damaging the work and discipline."

We can pretty well guess the purpose of these Catholic managers in the schools. It is for exactly the same reason that the Gestapo keep an eye on all schools under Hitler—to see there is not the slightest suggestion of heresy, in the one case against Romanism and in the other against Nazism. It is a long time since such a damning indictment has appeared in the Catholic press. And the interesting thing about it is that it is true.

A very valuable piece of information is given to the world also by the "Universe." For the enlightenment of one of its readers it explains that devils cannot perform "true miracles." We don't know the difference between a true miracle and a false one, since it would seem that a miracle is a miracle without regard to who performs it. Hell seems just as much a miracle as heaven and God in a fit of ill-humour sending people to hell because they will not obey him, or because they displease him, seems equalled by the stories told of the wonderful things that Satan does. And certainly, so far as one can judge—on religious information from the Catholic world—God seems unable to take to himself but a small number of those who die. Perhaps the "Universe" will be good enough to give us a simple account of how one can discriminate between a miracle that comes from the master of heaven and one that is work of the king of hell.

We hope that people are noting the way in which God is helping in the war. Just when a dry—comparatively dry—season would have materially helped our armies to press home the attack on Germany, down comes the rain in full spurt, holding the Allies back and giving the Germans every opportunity for destroying land and people and so cheering up the Germans. We might have been by now well into enemy territory. Yet we have fully worded prayers for better weather, and those of our generals who happen to be religious are going out of the way to put our trust in God; we are let down in some of our vital moments. But still good Christians go on praising God. Another example that camels and Christians take their burdens kneeling.

How charmingly is the way in which nature accommodates taste to opportunities! We have always taken it for granted that everyone would prefer a turkey for Christmas if the birds were cheaper. The Minister of Food, Colonel Llewellyn has announced that there are plenty of turkeys for Christmas, but not enough for everybody to have one, and he cheerfully remarks that very many prefer a lump of pork or a fowl, etc. We have always been under the impression that nearly all would prefer a turkey but for the cost. But Providence, which works hand-in-hand with our political rulers, properly corrects us. Providence works on the square, and a political Minister is, in England, incapable of telling a lie.

The Rev. Mr. Elliott says that prayer is the greatest power in the world. And yet it cannot send people to Church. There are thousands of preachers asking God to send customers their way. But the numbers decline.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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### TO CORRESPONDENTS

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### SUGAR PLUMS

WE deal elsewhere in this issue with the "Thanksgiving" ceremony in the Albert Hall and Thomas Paine. It should, however, be placed on record that the American Ambassador named three men as being mainly responsible for the creation of the "United States of America." These were Thomas Paine, Washington and Franklin. Of these three Paine was a deist, Franklin was certainly that, and probably an Atheist, and Washington's religion was of a dubious character. Jefferson and Lincoln must also be placed among the non-Christians. Add to that the fact that God was left out of the American constitution and the religious gush of our own leaders loses a great deal of its marketable value.

Our old friend Mr. Arthur Hanson writes: "Many thanks for the quotations from Llewelyn Powys. Unfortunately it is easier ordering books than getting them nowadays! The following in regard to Lucretius is from the same author's 'Rats in the Belfry':—

"With what a splendour of indignation this great liberator of the human race regarded religion, and with what dauntless 'virtue' his strong soul entered each gloomy cave of superstition to overthrow it 'from top to bottom.' He is the dauntless champion of the earthborn and he does not hesitate to raise his mortal head to outstare those two mighty intimidators, God and Death."

And here is another quotation from "The Letters of Llewelyn Powys":—

"... Alyse and I are reading Dante. I get what you mean about his style, like a sword bare of rust, but I am amazed at the Christian cruelty, what a commentary upon the wickedness of his religion with its love of fire and—page after page of it—how utterly lacking in health. Where are the cowslip meadows, where is the warm sun, where is any ordinary human feeling? It is impious to feel pity for any poor wretch who suffers by the will of God. And what a mean, vicious ardent spirit Dante has, how cowardly. I feel sympathy with the devil on the causeway who wished to set a hook in the lean of his buttock. Christ! And what an unpleasant face, with that adder's mouth, slanting down, down, narrow, narrow, narrow. He does little honour to the human race, to this race of long-lived animals with its capacity for thrilling enjoyment utterly ruined by superstition and mythological imaginings. The reading of Dante has been a revelation to me."

The recent debate held by the Keighley branch of the N.S.S. between the Rev. Frank Harwood, Vicar of Oakworth, and Mr. H. Stewart Wishart, of Keighley, a seasoned comrade of the Freethought movement, was a great success. The subject "That the Secularist view of Human Life is superior to the Christian view," was finely discussed and honours were fairly even, both speakers were keenly alert and upheld their separate claims in a worthy manner. Councillor A. R. Bentley, of Bingley, made an ideal chairman.

Following the close of the war there will be formed a world organisation which will be intended to act as a court for the settlement of international differences. But if that organisation is to play the part it should, it must be taken that no professional politicians should be permitted to sit on the counsel. The politician may have his uses. He may even play the part of a witness who is summoned before a court for an expression of opinion on a special subject. But he must be denied any other function. The controllers of the court must, in the fullest sense of the word, be composed of able and independent minds. Permit the court, or the institution, to become a playground for politicians and reliance on their fairness and their sense of justice disappears. This is a warning we expected when the League of Nations was formed, and the results justified the warning. Some title such as a "League of People," or "Court of International Justice" would serve. But keep the politicians out!

Mr. J. T. Brighton pays a visit to Glasgow to-day (December 10) and will speak in the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow, at 2.30 p.m. on "Errors in Education." Mr. Brighton has the gift of seasoning his address with appropriate humour, and those present will find him an easy and attractive speaker. The lecture is under the auspices of the local N.S.S. Branch. Admission is free, with Donation Tickets which may be had from Collett's Bookshop, 75, George Street, or at the door of the Cosmo Cinema.

Reading, Berks. Freethinkers willing to co-operate in forming a Reading branch of the National Secular Society, are asked to communicate in writing with Miss D. Beyfus, The Old House, Mill Lane, Henley-on-Thames. Here the ladies are taking the lead and we wish them every possible success in the early formation of a strong branch of the Society.

In the Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate, Blackburn, to-day (December 10) Mr. J. V. Shortt will lecture for the local N.S.S. Branch on "The Longest Lesson in Life." Mr. Shortt is well known to Blackburn audiences and may be relied upon to give an interesting and instructing lecture. The lecture commences at 3.15 p.m. and admission is free.

War or no war, the Roman church never overlooks the importance of propaganda. And, bearing in mind the type of character upon which the Roman Catholic Church miracle working is a strong and profitable—in terms of both cash and credit—thing. So in days when non-Catholic Christians are giving up the miraculous, the R.C. keeps its harvest of new miracles (with the old pattern) duly and, to the Church profitably continue to appear. The latest example comes from Canada, where some remarkable cures are occurring round the grave of a monk who died recently at the age of 92. As a large portion of illness have a nervous basis, the cures may be admitted. Many ordinary doctors achieve cures by—of necessity—working along the lines of the patient's weakness—with external persuasion of a bottle of medicine that is quite harmless in itself. Anyone with a little knowledge and a fair amount of common sense may achieve many of these cures. The case against the Church is that it deliberately fosters a state of mind that honest and intelligent people would do their best to wipe out. To live on the credulity of others is a common thing, but it is a very contemptible one.

## GEORGE MEREDITH : FREETHINKER

(Continued from page 455)

LET us turn next to the fine ode entitled "France: December, 1870." Meredith loved France and French literature. When she lay prone at the feet of Germany, at the end of that terrible year, he contributed this ode to the "Fortnightly Review." It could have been written by no other man in England. From the first line to the last it was a glorious achievement; full of insight, and thought, and grand imagery, and strong passion, and noble music. Meredith smiled pathetically at the Catholics in France talking of intercession with Heaven and direct aid from that quarter:—

"When the whole tragic tale hangs on a broken blade!"

No good could come in that way to the nation that had so stood for Reason:—

"Could France accept the fables of her priests,  
Who blessed her banners in the game of beasts,  
And now bid hope that heaven will intercede  
To violate its laws in her sore need,  
She would find comfort in their opiates."

France could *not* accept the fables of her priests. She had advanced too far for that. Her need was strength; and strength was not obtainable by frantic yearning:—

"Lo, strength is of the plain root-virtues born:  
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,  
Train by endurance, by devotion shape.  
Strength is not won by miracle or rape.  
It is the offspring of the modest years,  
The gift of sive to son, thro' *those firm laws*  
*Which we name Gods*; which are the righteous cause,  
The cause of man, and manhood's ministers."

Nothing saner was ever uttered. And the words I have italicised show how the poet stood towards Theism. What men called Gods were but the firm laws of Nature—Nature who never accommodates herself to man, but leaves man to accommodate himself to her. His doing so is wisdom and health; his not doing so is folly and death.

I should need more space than I have at command to deal with Meredith's final position with regard to Theism. Everything turns eventually on the doctrine of a future life. That is the real parting of the ways between Theology and Humanism. Supernatural religion began in animism and ends with it. When a man gives up belief in his own "ghost" he is at the beginning of the end. His abandonment of belief in all other "ghosts" is only a matter of time. Now it is clear, even without the Letters, that Meredith had rejected the idea of personal immortality. Such poems as "The Question Whither," "The Thrush in February," and, above all, "A Faith on Trial," may be indicated in proof. The last poem was called forth by the poet's loss of his wife. Love is face to face with the Destroyer. We are in the holy of holies. The sincerity and beauty of it are wonderful. The voice of grief is not only the voice of a suffering man, but also the voice of a great poet. Every plea for personal reunion after death is criticised and dismissed. The penetrating intellect refuses assent to the cries of the bleeding heart. It is perceived that love of the dead only expresses itself worthily in service to the living. The dancing children round their maypole bring the poet back at last to "the hungers of his kind." He has come through his ordeal with the firmer conviction that immortality is of the race and not of the individual. His philosophy had stood the test. Heated in the fires of grief, it had been cooled again in the fountain of wisdom, and was henceforth as strong as steel.

Meredith's death brought one striking testimony to this aspect of his philosophy. It was from the pen of Dr. Robertson Nicoll in the "British Weekly." In one of his interviews with Meredith the poet read aloud a strong passage from Tennyson's "In Memoriam." What followed should be told in Dr. Nicoll's own words:—

"The last quotation led him to talk about personal immortality. 'You believe in it?' he said. 'But, for my part, I cannot conceive it. Which personality is it which endures? I was one man in youth, and another man in middle age.' He then moved his stick in the ground, and said, 'I have been this, and this, and this. Which is it that is immortal?' I ventured to remind him of what John Stuart Mill said about the persistence of the ego. He said, with some vehemence, 'I do not feel it. I have never felt the unity of personality running through my life. I have been'—this with a smile—'I have been six different men: six at least. No,' he said, 'I cannot conceive personal immortality.' This is the teaching of his writings."

Meredith grew sterner in his later years with regard to the "consolations" of religion. It is ourselves we are thinking of, not the dead, when we look for these supports. They are rather opiates than tonics. Meredith remorselessly noted in "A Faith on Trial" that:—

"If we strain to the farther shore,  
We are catching at comfort near."

Writing to Leslie Stephen in 1902, in view of an approaching operation, Meredith opened his mind freely on this point:—

"We two have looked at the world and through men, and to use the word consolation is but a common scribble, for there is none under a deep affliction that can come from without, not from the dearest of friends. What I most wish for you I know you to have, fortitude to meet a crisis, and its greater task, to endure."

"There is no consolation for a weeping heart," he writes to the Countess of Lytton in 1905. "Only the mind can help it, when the showers have passed." Writing soon afterwards to his brother-in-law, Edward Vulliamy, who had lost his wife, Meredith said: "There is no consolation to be offered. It has to be endured." Death is death. "Smoking priests' opium," to use an expression of Meredith's in one of his letters to me, will not alter the fact—but it will weaken and debase us. We should not seek a drugged acquiescence in Nature's decrees, but "accept Reality in all its forms; for so we come to benevolence and to a cheerful resignation; there is no other road to wisdom." Meredith dissented from Hardy's "twilight view of life." Resignation to reality should be cheerful. "My religion of life," he wrote to Wilfrid Meynell only a few months before his death, "is always to be cheerful." "For I think," he had written to an American correspondent twenty years earlier, "that all ought use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us."

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded)

## OBITUARY

Mr. W. Mather passed away in his 80th year on November 16 last, after a painful illness borne with much courage and patience. He was a great admirer of Mr. Cohen, and the "Freethinker," and an earnest advocate of freethought. He was a man of strong and fearless character, a sure friend, sympathetic and always helpful to any in distress. By his conduct he always showed himself worthy of the name of "Freethinker" in every respect.

M. B.

## SUNDAY CRICKET

YOUR reference—as a “Sugar Plum”—to protests of the clergy against Sunday football, constrains me to enlighten some of your readers as to Sunday cricket.

I recently made the discovery—in a published war-time diary—that cricket matches were played at Lord's on several Sundays in 1942. One match was broadcast to Australia, but it was hushed up here.

I wrote to the “Cricketer”—edited by Sir Pelham Warner, who has done so much for the game—asking merely as a matter of history (there was no idea of commencing a religious controversy in so inappropriate a place), if this was unprecedented. For the first time a letter of mine was not published. When I pressed for publication I was informed that Sir Pelham did not think it desirable that it should be known. Quite like a Victorian writing on sex! I was further told that the M.C.C. did not recognise Sunday cricket.

In the course of a further letter (which no doubt was long ago consigned to the waste-paper basket), I expressed my amusement and amazement at this statement inasmuch as in the spring and summer hundreds of Sunday matches are played. I referred also to a team called the British Empire and to the fact—most appropriate in view of Christians being in a minority in the Empire—that they played on Sundays and that their matches were reported in the “Cricketer.” Moreover, Sir Pelham is president of the club. This certainly is a form of encouragement!

We must, however, beware! In 1921, when the first test-matches were played since 1912, we suffered sad reverses against the Australians. A lady discovered the secret. The Test Match Selection Committee met on a Sunday. If history repeats itself we shall know who is to blame. The eye of omniscience must know that the Lord's Day has not always been kept on Lord's ground. No doubt we can take it, but it is a pity the M.C.C. should have asked for trouble. If only a service had been held before or after those matches in 1942, it might have passed up above. I know of no redeeming feature. I have not heard even of a charity collection.

W. KENT.

## THE AMERICAN SCENE

(Concluded from page 459)

ated later botanical discoveries and alarmed his special creationist contemporaries by claiming that “new species and new genera are continually arising by derivation from existing forms.”

The labours of individual scientists were supplemented by the activities of the American Philosophical Society, a body dating back to colonial times which now redoubled its efforts. In several respects, this important body was the counterpart of our own Royal Society. It gathered members from all parts of America and indeed the whole civilised world. Many leaders of European science and culture became members. No department of science was neglected in its invaluable publications, while its influence in educated circles broadened public opinion. Our authors declare that, “At the sessions of the American Philosophical Society all the scientific questions which occupied the thought of the Old World and the New were seriously debated. It could be truly said that no modern speculation or problem discussed by the savants of Europe escaped the scrutiny of the Academy at Philadelphia—that lively centre which inspired the formation of similar bodies and special associations in every part of the United States.”

T. F. PALMER.

## HITLER AND GOD

FREETHINKERS would do well to pay careful attention to the world of international politics. It often happens, I think, that statements are made by political leaders which are perfect examples of that fundamental irrationalism against which Free-thought stands firm.

Possibly the most recent example of this tendency, which has been given wide publicity in the British Press, is the supposed Hitler proclamation which was read by Himmler and broadcast over the Nazi radio on November 12 last. It contained the usual Nazi misrepresentations of all that has happened in previous months and years, but it has one crucial passage which has not (for obvious reasons) been sufficiently underlined in the British Press. This is it:—

“The bourgeois world, which on a past occasion, knowingly or unwittingly acted as henchmen to the Bolsheviks, was drifting to its downfall, stricken blind by God.”

We are sometimes told, by people who ought to know better, that Hitler is an anti-religious maniac, that he is anti-Christ, or that he persecutes this or that religion with relentless fanaticism. Surely such a statement as that which I have quoted, broadcast in his name, should be sufficient to prove to every observant reader or listener that, far from being anti-religious, he is one of the most religious men in the world. And his very fanaticism in pursuit of worldly power gives him a position in a long line of tyrants, including medieval Popes and that Christian gentleman, General Franco, who has succeeded in filling the gaols of Spain with innocent people in recent years.

No; our clerical friends should be brought to realise that, whatever crimes Hitler may have committed, the religious motive, far from dissuading him, has merely given him encouragement in his evil courses.

S. H.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

## LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, 11 a.m., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.: “The Grounds of Internationalism.”

## COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public Lecture Halls, Northgate, Blackburn).—Sunday, 3.15 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORTT: “The Longest Lesson in Life.”

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. A. C. DURTON: “Polygamy. Is it Necessary?”

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: “Errors in Education.”

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. J. VILJESID: “The Spanish Civil War and the Roman Catholic Church.”

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

“THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.” By C. G. L. DU CANN. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; postage 1d.

“ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING.” Four Series. By CHAPMAN COHEN. Price each series 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d. The four volumes 10s., post free.

## WHEN IS A SOUL—?

AS a Freethinker I consider it necessary to pay a certain amount of serious attention to the ideas of those people who may have religious beliefs that are the obvious product of misunderstanding the nature of life, or lack of knowledge of the facts of nature. Simple ignorance of ascertained facts is often the cause of people retaining beliefs which they would probably throw off if they knew more, for many people have the capacity to understand, but this is undeveloped in the absence of the necessary knowledge of a subject. Personally, I can exhibit a fund of patience with such people, as I feel that new angles presented to them, or fresh information, of which they were unaware, will often set them thinking, with a real possibility of some good accruing.

But what can one hope for with that type of believer who is prepared to believe and propound, or the believer who is prepared to accept and believe, some of the more atrocious non-sensical doctrine laid down by institutional religion? Such people make one feel ready to abandon hope for certain sections of humanity. To illustrate the sort of thing I mean, read this classical example of religious lunacy, culled from "The Catholic Herald" answers column, which appeared in a recent issue.

Question: When is the soul created. Is it at the moment of conception. If not, when?—Answer: It is in accordance with Catholic philosophy that as soon as the embryonic organism begins to show a specifically human pattern in its development there must be present a specifically human directive principle or "form." Modern scientific research detects in the earliest stages of the development of the human fertilised ovum growth according to a specifically human pattern. The spiritual soul is the human "form." We conclude that the soul is created and infused at the moment of fertilisation of the ovum. This is not, of course, an article of Faith, but it is considered sufficiently certain for the Church to direct that at whatever stage, however early, a pregnancy should terminate, the product thereof should be baptised because it is a human being.

The Wizard of Oz who prepares and dresses up for Catholic consumption such philosophical offals must either be fooling himself, or one who regards his readers as fools. Rarely have I read such a hybrid hotch-potch of sheer nonsense, scientific inaccuracy, religious deception and plain honest-to-goodness lying. What is the Editor thinking about to allow even a priest (if the Answers man happens to be a priest) to get away with this sort of thing in a newspaper that must be read by many intelligent people, albeit they are Catholics?

Is there no room for ordinary common sense in Catholic "philosophy" that it should offer such a mental abortion as this philosophic tenet, to be acted upon by every poor (or rich) Catholic woman who may be faced with the reality of a physical abortion?

"... the product thereof should be baptised because it is a human being."

Let me take the Answers man down a street in a poor district that I know, far from the godly peace and comfort of his office or study, to where some agonised Catholic woman, victim of the Catholic "philosophy," and of an economic order that that philosophy has for long supported, awaits his ministrations (if he be a priest) to baptise a miscarried foetus that now lodges in an enamel pail, her home lacking even the indoor lavatory wherein the "soul" of her fertilised but undeveloped ovum might be respectably and literally baptised, washing away its "sin" as it might itself be literally washed away by the flushing tank.

Such a foetus, "because it is a human being," he would religiously baptise (or would he?) Then he might find time also to pray for the woman on the bed, for she too, I would remind him, is a human being, and has not only a philosophical but a theological "sin" from which she must be saved. Thus would they both be preserved from the torments of a "literal" Hell which, despite its "distinct Catholic atmosphere," couldn't melt an ice-cream cornet. Oh, the lunacy of religious philosophy!

And the genius—! "Modern scientific research detects . . . growth according to a specifically human pattern." Of course it does, my dear Mr. Answers man. At an even earlier stage than your brilliant philosophy imagines. Is there not "growth according to a specifically human pattern" in the separate gametes of the sperm and the ovum before they come together? Could such growth produce anything other than that which is in accordance with human development? Would you expect the separate gametes to contain a potential cow or an elephant?

If your "philosophy," based on modern scientific research, recognises such growth in the first joining of the cells, "at the moment of fertilisation," what is to prevent your recognising (according to modern scientific research) such human growth in the separate cells, as they ripen in the parental body?

Scientifically, nothing need prevent you. But of course you are not scientists; you are theologians—priests, pillars of the Church. Your interest is not in the biological fact of cellular growth, but in the potential "child for the Church" within the developing embryo. Also, in the minds of the ignorant, there may be a greater awe for a lost zygote, or an embryo, than there would be for mere gametes, together with the commercial value which attaches to the soul of an identifiable foetus, but which could hardly attach itself, even in the mind of a devout Catholic, to a single gamete.

Souls are something that can be prayed for, and prayers are something that can be paid for. So the sooner the soul appears the better for the Church—within reasonable limits. The reasonable limit you have set is "the moment of fertilisation," and you are wise to leave it there, after all, as theologians, for the clients of theologians are hardly likely to appreciate the niceties of "growth according to a specifically human pattern" in any earlier stage of the reproductive process.

It beats me, however, how you manage to get away with it after 70 years of public education—until I remember that we still have Church schools, some of them with a Catholic atmosphere. With such a theology there is little wonder that your Church, from the parish priest to the Pope, is opposing scientific sex-education.

But you are beating your heads against a wall of stone. Slowly, but none the less surely, the Infinite Wisdom of the Church is sinking beneath the waves of common sense and human perception, for even Catholics are often better educated than their creed.

One day all your souls, from the embryonic to the adult, will be . . . but a topic for the indulgent laughter or cynical pity of a wiser generation, for people are already shedding their theological ideas as a rabbit sheds its fur in the moult.

F. J. CORINA.

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