

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Man and His Gods

THERE is everywhere indisputable evidence that mankind is outgrowing his gods. We emphasise that word "outgrowing" because it would be rash to say that even among those who believe themselves to have cleansed their minds of this primitive conception there are not plenty who are still influenced by it. There is nothing very surprising in this. The language we speak was framed in conditions that placed the supernatural in the foreground. We may use such expressions as the "roar of the sea" or the "pull of the tide" as mere terms that help us to draw maps of nature, but the old associations between man and his primitive environment still have their influence. It is true to say that men are outgrowing their gods, but the fact of the matter is that there is still an unconscious fear of them. Madame de Staël's famous saying, "I do not believe in ghosts, but I am afraid of them," goes much farther and deeper than ghosts, and many who consider themselves "cultured" still shiver at their possibility. Frames of mind once developed are very hard to eradicate. The past operates very often as a man who has had his leg amputated still feels it as though it is part of his body. If I may make a confession, I might say that all I have now to write has been said in these few lines. But what I have to say may be taken as illustrative matter.

The L.C.C. Public Control Committee recently had to decide whether it should or should not grant a licence for two cinemas in the Old Kent Road on Sundays. Mark, it is not a question as to the opening of more cinemas, but whether a cinema already licensed, and which conducts its business in a proper manner, should be open for a few hours on Sunday. There would be some sense in the question if the place was overcrowded with cinemas and an application was made for more; or even if the people who went to cinemas were called as witnesses in the matter. But the case resolved into "attendants versus non-attendants," and the application should have been ruled out. The basis on which the objectors stood was simply rotten. It was a rotten plea, as it stood, set forth by interested individuals and based upon laws that are a disgrace to a country claiming to be called civilised.

For the special ground here is that we should devote one day in the week to God; and that seems to me turning things upside down. It is not us who should devote time to God; it is a far more important thing to God that he should always keep in close touch with mankind. For in these days God has—it is made quite clear by those who claim to be his official representatives—need of every follower he can get. Those who are alert can appreciate the significance in the New Testament that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner arriving than over many

righteous men. The latter may be very tiresome people. They certainly are on earth.

### Defeat of a Trinity

To get back to the cinema in the Old Kent Road. The attack appears to have been made up of two men and a movement. The two men were the Rev. Collin Kerr, Chairman of the Evangelical Youth Movement, Mr. Charles Phillips, of the Ebenezer Mission (sounds like a figure from one of Dickens' novels) and Mr. H. H. Martin, Secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society, which carries with it no promise of a joyous meeting of any kind. Mr. Martin, we believe, said nothing, and so may be said to have been at his best. The vocal two fixed their case on the alleged depravity of all youth that did not come under their care. Thus, he of the Ebenezer Mission said: "I have heard the children talking about what they had seen on the screen, and I feel that they are morally affected by being attracted away from Sunday school. Many leave the Sunday schools and become almost pagans." (We would give them full marks, and would expect them to turn out good citizens as they grow up.) Mr. Kerr also dealt with the same theme. He said: "The moral condition of the youth of to-day is absolutely deplorable. They are brought up practically without a moral code. Lying is accepted provided the action seems—"

At this point the Chairman interrupted and ordered the Vicar to sit down. He said:—

"I am not going to have you or anyone else using that chair as a forum for condemning the youth of this country. We are proud of our youth."

We commend the Chairman's behaviour when faced with such a gang of sanctified liars. Our own experience—and it has now become a lengthy one—is that the youth of to-day is not merely better from the outside, but he is vastly better from the inside. He is not so religious, which means in a good 75 per cent, that he is more independent in himself and far more useful as a citizen. The improvement is such that if one turns to the sketches left us by Dickens of the state of the youth of a more Christian England than exists to-day, and particularly if they will consult Henry Mayhew's "London Labour and London Poor" (published in 1851), he will see how tremendously conduct has improved step by step with the secularising of life. At that date of Mayhew's writing there were no Sunday recreations of any kind. No museums, games, concerts and amusements. Sunday was Sunday, with only the church and chapel—and public-house. And the relation between the two was well arranged. When the churches opened the public-houses closed; when the public-houses opened the churches closed. There was a twofold exhibition of narcotics, and the drug could be had either disembodied or disembodied. It was a spiritual age.

The worst of it was, and is, that this demoralising Sunday of ours is part of the law. In this respect the law

against blasphemy runs on all fours with that against the "desecration of the Sabbath." If I may divert for a moment, we may note that while the Atheist may be summoned for blasphemy the believer in God is the only one who can commit it. The Christian believes in God, and can therefore insult him—or it, or her. But as the Atheist has no god, and doesn't believe there is one, he simply cannot indulge in blaspheming against God. You simply cannot speak disrespectfully of a vacuum. A Christian may speak disrespectfully of God, so may the followers of Mumbo-Jumbo, but an Atheist really has not the material for committing blasphemy. We may also note that it is a House of Commons which is so choked to the neck with piety that it simply cannot think of God continuing to exist if there is not a police guard to protect him from assault. There is a curious fitness in the fact that when a good Christian begins to talk to God he goes on his knees and shuts his eyes. Who can doubt that when the Son of God was able to feed a "multitude" with a few loaves and fishes, and then picked up of what was left a few bags full, the Christian when at prayer listens with his eyes and sees through his ears.

### Consider the Liars, for They are as the Lilies

We will conclude with a few pregnant considerations that may throw some light on this talk of the sinfulness of the youth of this generation. From the war the Churches have gained something—at least in theory. How did they gain it? One thing that was driven home to most people who saw the ruins after the bombing of a large slice of East London were the horrible conditions in which so many were compelled to live. Yet not only was that area better than it had been, but it was well known to large numbers of the "upper classes." Royalty had visited the slums and had praised the people for their contentment. "Slumming parties," formed in the West End and intended for the East, were in the late eighties and early nineties a regular feature. This time, thanks to the severity of the war, those who first really saw what the slums of the East End meant were horrified, and, as the Churches had talked so much of their concern for the poor, some very nasty things were said. The men who did the digging out said openly that but for the loss of life we ought to send the Germans a vote of thanks for having destroyed such hovels. Attention was directed also to the Churches, and common was the comment: "What is the use of the Churches? What is their social value?" The clergy were as usual astute where personal interests were concerned. Instead of wasting time on a hopeless defence, they determined on an attack. Essentially, the Government was a Conservative one, and its policy has always been to stand for the "King, Church and Party." Large numbers of children had been sent out of the London area to escape bombing. So the three Archbishops—Canterbury, York and Wales—set to work. Many of the leading Nonconformists joined hands. First of all there came many strange stories about the children who had been scattered over the country. "The Times" also lent a hand and queer stories began to be told—names or places were never given. There were children without any knowledge of Jesus Christ; they knew nothing of religion; they were ignorant to the extreme, and their manners filled up the rest of the story: all this concerning children who had been in Council and Church schools, where prayers were said every day, and indeed

formed a regular part of their education. And of course the cure for this lay in having more clergy, more churches, and above all more definite religious control of the schools. It was a desperate plan, but it met with a measure of success: first in deflecting blame from the Churches on the ground of their futility, and second offering greater influence to the clergy.

We have not sufficient space further to elaborate one of the most cunning manoeuvres that have been seen for some time. The social function of the Church has been to keep the common people content and orderly. Of this we must be content with a bird's-eye glance and one or two illustrations of life a little more than a century ago. The first is from Gibbin's "Industrial History of England," describing the fate of very young children in the new factories. Children were sold like cattle and treated accordingly.

"Regular traffickers would . . . transfer a number of children to a factory district. . . . After that the children were simply at the mercy of their owners, nominally as apprentices but in reality as mere slaves. . . . It was often arranged by the parish authorities, in order to get rid of imbeciles, that one idiot should be taken by the mill-owner with every twenty sane children. The hardships of the other victims were due to capitalist greed and cruelty. The hours of their labour were only limited by exhaustion. Children were often worked sixteen hours a day, by day and by night."

As a comment on this, we may note that an Act of Parliament in 1819 limited the labour of children nine years of age to fourteen hours per day. We refer to the invaluable series of works by Mr. and Mrs. Hammond for detailed studies of the treatment of children at a time when there was going on a great revival of church and chapel activity. The following advice given by Hannah More, a very notable Christian writer, and who devoted much of her time and labour to advising the poor, may be cited. She was writing during a time of special strain upon the poor.

"Let me remind you that probably that very scarcity has been permitted by an all-wise Providence to unite all ranks of people together, to show the poor how immediately they are dependent upon the rich, and to show both rich and poor that they are all dependent upon Himself. It has also enabled you to see more clearly the advantages you derive from the government and constitution of this country—to observe the benefits flowing from the distinction of rank and fortune, which has enabled the high to so liberally assist the low."

We are not surprised that Thomas Paine, who gave us a full Beveridge scheme a century and a-half before his follower had written a line, should have been hunted out of the country, and slandered by the Churches more than any other man of his time.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### REPLYING TO PAINE

IN the standard "Life of Thomas Paine," that by Moncure Conway, a work which not only did full justice to his remarkable achievement but also must have made the better-class of Christian thoroughly ashamed of himself and of the malignant

religious attacks on a great Englishman, will be found some account of the replies made to the "Age of Reason."

The one which Dr. Conway felt was worth considering in detail was that by the Bishop of Llandaff, "An Apology for the Bible"—a title which caused bewildered George III to inquire why the Bible should want any apology at all for it. The Bishop was extremely liberal for his age, and had attempted a reply to Gibbon twenty years previously which did very little to help Christianity or harm Gibbon. As there had been already some replies to Paine, the Bishop must have felt their total inadequacy; and those that followed his were, as Dr. Conway points out, mostly taken from the "Apology." In actual fact, Paine has never been answered by the Bishop or anybody else. His criticism of the Bible, in nearly all its main outlines, stands as firm as it did when he wrote it; but, of course, Biblical criticism has developed so much that the "Age of Reason" has been left a long way behind. Paine started the holocaust, and it is being completed not merely by Freethinkers but by Christians themselves.

As I have said, Dr. Watson was very broad-minded; in fact, he must have been considered almost a heretic by his contemporaries, and his "surrenders" to Paine were no doubt unpalatable reading for his fellow Christians. Certainly his heresy stood in the way of his advancement, as he later saw. Conway quotes him writing five years before his death, "I have treated my divinity as I, twenty-five years ago, treated my chemical papers: I have lighted my fire with the labour of a great portion of my life."

"I cannot see how any Christian of the present time," says Conway, "can regard it [the "Apology"] otherwise than as a capitulation of the system it was supposed to defend, however secure he may regard the Christianity of to-day." And I am sure Bishop Watson himself, had he been alive when those words were penned, would not have been altogether surprised. That it never really satisfied those who wanted the "Age of Reason" smashed can be seen from the fact that, while Paine is always a "best-seller" (he has been so in the past and is still to-day), it is by no means easy to obtain a copy of the "Apology." It is difficult to imagine any modern publisher issuing a new edition—at least, not if he wants to sell it.

Conway, however, did not deal with the pamphlets written by Hannah More, at the request of the Bishop of London, to which I referred in an article a few weeks ago, and which had an enormous circulation. One of them, "The History of Mr. Fantom," was specially directed against both "The Rights of Man" and "The Age of Reason," and through the kindness of a reader of this journal I have been able to see a copy. It is given the place of honour in the edition of her works produced just after her death in 1833, and is a typical example of her pen. She was an easy and prolific writer, and no doubt in her day was considered the very acme of female perfection; and I am quite sure that she herself felt she was the best kind of example the women of England could ever have. And one can see her type of mind splendidly reflected in "Mr. Fantom."

It is difficult at this time of day to understand how such arrant rubbish could ever have scored any success. After all, we were in the days of Byron and other great poets, and the novels of Scott and Jane Austin counted readers by the thousand. There must have been some literary discrimination in the country.

That Paine was held up in horror by the Christians of his day, and later in almost universal execration, is a fact; and perhaps this pious attitude accounts for the way in which Mr. Fantom, who has been seduced by the "New Philosophy," is shown to be a most unmitigated blackguard while mouthing the universal benevolence which he culled from his "infamous"

master. "I have a plan in my head," he is made to cry, "for relieving the miseries of the whole world. Everything is bad as it now stands. I would alter all the laws, and do away all the religions, and put an end to all the wars in the world. I would everywhere redress the injustice of fortune, or what the vulgar call providence. I would put an end to all punishments; I would not leave a single prisoner on the face of the globe. This is what I call doing things on a grand scale."

But when it came to doing anything whatever for anybody in distress that was a different matter. No one more than Mr. Fantom was ready to put people in jail, and keep them there, if his own pocket had suffered. No one more than Mr. Fantom was ready to turn away the poor, the naked, the needy. He would allow the house of his neighbour to burn to ashes and not lift a finger to help in saving it. And as for helping the unfortunate people thus left without a shelter, they were spurned from his door.

His own valet, who stole from him, was rigorously pursued in the interests of justice—though the thief had also imbibed the horrible doctrines of the New Philosophy; and of course it was the New Philosophy which made the thief a murderer. When he was caught and sentenced to die, it is rather difficult to find out from Hannah More's recital whether she or her creation, Mr. Fantom, gloated more over the execution. We are indeed supposed to be edified by the "last words" of the murderer, which were duly given and which puts all the blame for the crime on Mr. Fantom's damnable doctrines—meaning, naturally, those of Thomas Paine.

Hannah, dear estimable lady, so anxious to save the souls of erring sinners, gives an example of how she feels about the spread of the ideas in the "Rights of Man" and the "Age of Reason." "If you were to get drunk every day," she makes the good Christian in her tract say, "and game every night, you would indeed endanger your own soul, and give a dreadful example to your own family; but great as those sins are, and God forbid that I should attempt to lessen them, still they are not worse, nay they are not so bad, as the pestilent doctrines with which you infect your house and your neighbourhood." And he indignantly asks, "Do you think a Being, whose very essence is love, would permit any misery here, if it was not to be, some way or other, or somehow or other, for their good? . . . God permits this very misery partly to exercise the sufferers and partly to try the prosperous. . . . So you see one reason why God permits misery is that good men may have an opportunity of lessening it."

In these days it is not easy to find words adequate enough to characterise this balderdash, but one can see why the work of Thomas Paine has persisted and has contributed perhaps as much as any other single man to promote what is now called Social Security, while the work of Hannah More is dead, if possible than the proverbial doornail. She was a typical product of the real Christianity which prevailed a hundred years ago, and of course still prevails in many parts of the country. It would be still with us everywhere but for the healthy influence of Freethought. And here again, in language which the plain common man could understand, it was the writings of Thomas Paine which commenced the great work of clearing the mind of man, and particularly of the poor, from the religious cant, humbug and intolerance which had been so long fostered by Christianity.

I expect if Moncure Conway had seen Hannah More's tract it must have made him squirm, and feel that it was not worth even referring to. But it is good for a modern reader to learn a little of what our early pioneers had to contend with and how much genuine Christianity stood in the way of all progress. Mr. Fantom is dead, but the work of Thomas Paine still lives for our inspiration and guidance.

H. CUTNER.

## ACID DROPS

SHADES of John Knox: what is happening to Scottish religion? Here is the Presbytery of Glasgow passing a resolution by a majority of five (71 to 66) in favour of women holding the rank of "elder" in the Church. "Women," said John Knox, "are the port and gate of the devil," and now a Scottish gathering of ministers and elders thinks that these friends of the devil may be admitted to an office in the Church. Perhaps the key to this revolutionary move is that the Churches are faring so badly that if Satan came along they would offer him the pulpit in the hope that he would ensure a "full house."

The Bishop of Bradford is distressed by the fact that there is "a general relapse from the practice of public worship." We can understand the Bishop's lament, and it is explained by the fact of the decay of *public* practice which disturbs him. It would not suit him if *everyone* merely praised God, for that could be done without Bishops and parsons. They would not be wanted. In addition to that, private prayers would not advertise religion. If there is a God he would get all the prayers possible. But the clergy, from the greenest curate to the most ponderous of Bishops, would be out of a job. That is putting the whole matter in a nutshell.

The "Catholic Times" reports Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Burnett, C-in-C. (South Africa), as saying: "I have yet to meet a sailor who has been through a great storm, or great action, and who does not believe in God." We hope that the Vice-Admiral is a better sailor than he is an observer, for there is only one, rather unpleasant, conclusion from his statement. We happen to send a fair number of copies of "The Freethinker"—paid for—to men and officers in the Navy, and we have reports that there is quite a rush for "The Freethinker" when it arrives. We have no reason to think that these readers of the "one and only" get the paper to strengthen their belief in Christianity. Let us hope that the Vice-Admiral is a much more reliable sailor than he appears to be as reporter.

On the other side, Archbishop Griffin, in his Advent Pastoral, says that "There is scarcely an article of faith which is not either denied or watered down by the overwhelming majority of our countrymen." We suggest that Archbishop Griffin and Vice-Admiral Burnett meet and fight it out. It is not for us to decide—if it were we should use just one word to fit both. We simply cannot believe that our sailors are less intelligent than are landmen.

Curiously, the next paper we picked up was "Time and Tide" (December 9). In this Mr. Norman Bentwich writes that he was riding in a night train going North. In the carriage was a sailor who turned out to be an Atheist (he must have escaped the Vice-Admiral's notice) and a lady (a W.A.A.F.). She was sure there was a God because in the last war a cousin of hers had actually seen the angels of Mons. That should have settled the matter, but the sailor stood his ground. We think that the W.A.A.F. and the Vice-Admiral ought to meet.

It is not easy to kill a religious lie, and some are entitled to be considered immortal. Our readers may remember a story concerning the Sign of the Cross that was seen in Ipswich. A parson there did his best to make capital of it, but he was compelled to silence when it became public that the vision was due to the mischievous mind of some of our airmen. The parson did not dare to say openly that he had been gulled. Now the sign has appeared in Aberdovey, North Wales, so says the "Bradford Daily Telegraph," writing on authority from Aberdovey. After all, there is nothing new in these, and other, visions. We have heard of men seeing snakes crawling round the walls of their bedroom. Devotion to spiritual things may be the explanation in both cases.

The Protestant Truth Society—an organisation that has, generally speaking, a closer contact with Protestantism than with truth—recently held a public meeting which protested

against the Pope taking any part at the coming Peace Conference. Naturally, we endorse the protest. It would be a number one scandal if the Pope was given an official place on such an occasion. The Pope is nothing more than the head of a Christian sect, and if one head is there, why not all? And if anyone is permitted to represent a religious sect, again, why not all? There is, we know, quite a number of influential people in this country who would like to see the Pope holding a prominent position in the Peace Conference, but it would be a first-rate scandal if anything of the kind happened.

Rev. J. A. Thompson, Superintendent of the Battersea Methodist Central Mission, says they had about 350 or 400 children on their rolls. But when the cinemas opened on Sundays that number was reduced to 60. The plain truth that sticks out here is that neither the children nor the bulk of their parents really wish their children to go to Sunday schools. They both prefer the cinema. But the parents would probably argue that the children must go somewhere on Sundays, and if there is no other place, then they might as well go to Sunday school. The Mission also agrees that if there is anywhere else to go children will not attend Sunday school. Why cannot these spiritual ghouls leave the children alone?

According to the "Daily Mail," the German leaders are preparing Adolf Hitler to be a "God." Presumably that will follow the announcement of his death. Given the opportunity it can be done. We have in ancient history the transformation of many men into gods, and in the New Testament legend we have the narrative of a man who became a god by his crucifixion. We must also bear in mind the fact that the Coronation of the King of England at Westminster is really no more than a very ancient repetition of a ceremony in which a god is incarnated in a man. The process of creating gods is well known to the modern anthropologist; and some gods are little better than is the German Adolf.

The Roman Church has always been noted for its grabbing quality where cash is concerned. And not satisfied with what it gets from the new Education Act, Bishop Marshall wants to induce the Government to give more cash than the new Act provides for. We have not the slightest doubt but that if a Tory Government is returned after the war something will be done to meet the desires of Rome, and we must not forget that the Roman Catholic Church in this country has a goodly number of friends in high places. And Rome has always been able to wait.

In a very outspoken article in the "Church Times," the writer declares that out of several thousand questions asked by members of the Services about religion, not once did any man or woman seek knowledge about the Eucharist. Also "there was complete and total ignorance about the essential meaning" of the Holy Sacrament. "Hardly anyone showed that he realised the vital place of the Service in Church life." In addition, there appears to be "no audible sign" of interest in "baptism, confirmation or confession," or any desire to accept "anyone so questionable as the Holy Ghost."

But the greatest surprise is still to come. It appears that large numbers of men "are slow to accept Jesus Christ as a historical figure," which will come as a shock to many of our reverent Rationalists. Some of the men look upon Jesus as a good man—exactly as do our Rationalist historicists—and while denying that "Jesus Christ was the Son of God," yet regarded themselves as members of either the Anglican or Nonconformist denomination. The upshot of all this inquiry is that no longer can these nominal Christians call themselves Trinitarians. They just believe in some vague Theism which is not even a sort of weak Unitarianism; and as they do not believe in "sin" or "miracles," and feel that prayer is not worth much unless it is "petitionary," the outlook for Christianity when the men come back is very bleak.

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### SUGAR PLUMS

The B.B.C. has launched a series of broadcasts on how great books were written. The second chosen was Darwin's "Origin of Species." The patient research of Darwin year after year, searching, experimenting, rejecting and accepting was in itself an example from which many could profit. On the whole the production of the "Origin of Species," was well done. With one criticism, the scene between Huxley and the very blatant Bishop Wilberforce, better known as "Soapy Sam," was also well produced. In the Royal Society meeting "Soapy Sam" had sneeringly asked Huxley whether he claimed descent from an ape on the side of his father or mother. Huxley replied if he had to choose his descent from an ape or from a priest who had used his ability as the bishop had used his, he would prefer the ape. It is said that some hearers fainted.

There is one other piece of criticism that one may make. The broadcast ended with the repetition of Darwin's closing words in the "Origin" in which he refers to the grandeur of the evolutionary view of life being originally "breathed by the Creator" in to living forms, etc. Complete honesty would have said that Darwin later explained that by "God" he meant no more than "happened by some unknown cause." But the B.B.C. does not deal with things in that way.

There is one great feature that is worth noting over the furore that occurred with the publication of the "Origin of Species." It began and was finished almost in the lifetime of those who advocated it. The conception of evolution as a theory covering the whole of the world of living things goes back to the time of the ancient Greeks. The conception was fully displayed in that magnificent work of Lucretius "On the Nature of Things," a work loved for its beauty and admired for its depth of thought. Of course, his special theories were wrong, the knowledge was not available for accuracy of detail. But he set out to show that whatever the superstitious said was done by God, he would prove occurred by nature and by nature alone. That was nearly nineteen hundred years ago. Then came Christianity, and the world darkened with the growth of the Church. Centuries passed, and with the recovery of some of the ancient learning, and the influence of the scientific knowledge of the Mohammedan world, the Christian Church was forced to permit what it could no longer forbid.

But consider where the world might have been to-day but for the opposition of the Christian Churches. In every branch of science men worked first with their very lives in the hands of the priesthood. And when that began to weaken, social pressure took its place. As late as the beginning of the nineteenth century men were robbed in this country of their civic lives. They were refused copyright for their books, they were imprisoned for attacking the Christian mass of fairy tales, savage survivals, and the most ignorant of religious teaching. Men were punished for saying that the world was round, that the earth went round the sun. As late as the seventeenth century Newton's theory of celestial gravitation could only find its way into our principal university by a trick. And only a matter of thirty years before the "Origin of Species" religious pressure was so great that Chambers asked his publisher to promise not to disclose his name as the author of "Vestiges of Creation." What other curse ever hung for so long as Christianity over the scientific progress of the world?

Darwin was spared the kind of persecution that other men suffered for trying to enlighten their fellows. But the publication of the "Origin of Species" in 1859 aroused a storm that was as fierce as leading Christians could make it. The note was given by Bishop Wilberforce, who declared that Darwin was guilty of a tendency to limit God's glory in creation.

A very foolish comment, but quite Christian in its religious humbug. The plain and constant fact is that it is either evolution or nothing. Naturally, the true Christian prefers nothing wrapped up in prayers and religious doctrines. But the truth remains that if we are to understand nature some form of evolution must be adopted. "God," applied as an explanation or an understanding, is just plain nonsense, and so is indispensable to every genuine religious attitude.

The "Church Times" can sometimes be most unkind, and to be unkind to a Freethinker is perhaps a Christian duty. But the Rev. W. H. Elliott might well ask why be unkind to *him*? For in its review of Mr. Elliott's "Do Be Practical" it reproduces what he wrote after Munich: "We have awakened from our nightmare, and the Dawn has come. Not only, I think, the Dawn of a respite from imminent war, but of a new spirit, which is in the world at the moment and which, slowly spreading, will soon pervade it all." On which outstanding prophecy the "Church Times" comments: "The remarkable thing is not so much that he should have written like that at the time, but that this book should be published now." As Mr. Elliott believes that he is in some way commending God to the people, he might easily have selected a better example. But if he had shown that measure of common sense, he would not have been the Rev. Elliott that we know.

Canon Dlewelyn is making an appeal for Bibles for the use of Germans in a German prisoner of war camp. The Canon says there is one Bible only in the camp, but the soldiers are very religious. Well, if the soldiers get their Bibles, they should turn to the following passage as a very familiar guide for German fighting men. It is God himself who speaks: "When the Lord thy God hath delivered (a city) into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women and all that is in the city . . . thou shalt take unto thyself. . . . Of the cities of those people which the Lord thy God doth give thee . . . thou shalt save nothing that breatheth." We fancy that the German soldiers will recognise God's wishes in these orders.

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## MODERN ATHEISM AND PROPAGANDA

NOT very long ago I debated with an Anglican vicar on "Does God Exist?" and towards the close of his opening speech the vicar said: "Of course, Mr. Corina has come here to-night to deny that God exists . . ." Never was there a more surprised clergyman than this one when, in opening my speech in reply, I said the vicar had got me all wrong, and his ideas of modern Atheism all wrong, for I had come not to deny the existence of God, but to affirm the existence of many gods, to explain their composition, and then to establish the Atheistic position by using the gods themselves for that purpose. I suggested that before the vicar again debated with an Atheist he should acquaint himself with the case for modern Atheism so as not to appear so old-fashioned on the public platform.

This criticism, though delivered good humouredly, and taken so by the vicar, was nevertheless fully deserved, for the vicar had not the slightest idea of the developments that have taken place in the last fifty years or so in the scientific background of Atheism. His ideas of an Atheist were hopelessly Victorian, and I dare say that if my personal character had not been fairly well-known in the district he might have assumed, in his antiquated innocence, that I was also a wife beater, a seducer of women, a thief and a drunkard. The only mitigation of his ignorance—or innocence—was the fact that he came from a very sheltered parish, in which relics of the past, wearing the mental frock coats of Victoria's days, formed the substantial part of his congregation.

Indeed, in a controversial sense, it was a case of an Anglican fool being persuaded to rush in where a Congregational angel had feared to tread, the local Congregational minister having excused himself from the debate and passed the baby after he had been warned by a friend that God would need some looking after with that Corina fellow knocking around.

But this is personal digression. The full story of this debate is very amusing, but I must not be led astray. What I really wanted to show is the extent to which many religious leaders are unacquainted with the grounds upon which Atheism may scientifically build itself to-day, compared with sixty or so years ago. As this, vicar is typical of a great many of the present day clergy there is little wonder that they still prattle from the pulpit that "there is no conflict between religion and science." They seem to have heard so little about anthropology, or the more recent developments in embryology, genetics, and biochemistry.

So we must forgive them their lapses, for they cannot learn from what they do not know—and those among them who do know cannot be blamed for preserving a discreet silence, for we are all perhaps a little more discreet where scientific knowledge impinges upon our professions and our economic interests.

While we may be content, however, to leave the official representatives of religion still opposing scientific thought either in simple ignorance or by means of the Wilberforcian "monkey tricks" which T. H. Huxley knocked out of count many years ago, we cannot so lightly overlook any corresponding defect in the Freethought movement—a defect as a consequence of which some of us still champion our position exclusively by arguments which are now in a fair way to becoming as obsolete as the ideas to which they are opposed.

It is my personal feeling that, particularly during the later war years, there is an accelerated interest being taken in the Freethinking position. This personal view is evidently supported in official quarters by reports of a growing demand for Freethought literature—a demand that cannot at the moment be fully satisfied. From this we may reasonably conclude that people to-day, and especially the younger generations, are not merely becoming more and more dissatisfied with the burnt offerings of the religious cook-house, but are looking further afield for a newer and saner outlook which will more fully

and more truthfully fit in with the new knowledge of the times, with which knowledge they are rather better acquainted than are their elders, tricklings of science having percolated into our schools despite the watchdogs of God.

It seems to me that we are passing out of the stage when the simple exposure of Biblical nonsense, or the historical exposure of institutional religion, are sufficient to bestir the tide of thought in the direction of our movement. That form of propaganda has done yeoman service in the past, when religious belief (I write particularly of "Christendom," of course) was more directly connected with Biblical teachings. To-day, however, Biblical or "inspired" and "revealed" grounds for religious faith, have disintegrated, largely washed away by the relentless stream of past controversy and challenge. Biblical criticism in all its form (even the mythicists and anti-mythicists, gnawing at their bone of contention) has done much to bring this situation about. But beneath the washed out sands of the Christian foundation lies the harder rock of the god idea itself, as distinct from the Christian form of expression of the idea, and to disturb this more solid basis of godism will need more than the running stream of controversy. It will need also, more than ever before, the dynamite of those modern sciences which in the last half century or so have done much to change our concepts not only of the nature of man himself, but of life generally.

Continuing in metaphor, the Christian tide is at low ebb to-day, with no shining moon of intellect to raise it back to the higher shores on which its waves once lapped and rippled with greedy embrace over most of the pebbles on the beach. But the sticky weed of godism remains in many places, and scientific treatment must be prescribed for its removal.

In Freethought propaganda to-day we often find our attacks on Christianity sympathetically received by those who, disgusted by the creed, and having thrown it overboard, yet retain a god-problem of a less sectarian but more fundamental kind. They appreciate our service to the social development of mankind by our weakening of the institution of Christianity, but they deplore our attacks on something they still believe to be inherent in human-kind—the god idea. The best of them have shifted their ground because they demanded something better than Christianity offered, but the god idea remains. We must also shift our ground, in the sense of a readjustment of propaganda values, if we are to satisfy them of their continued misconceptions. The older style of propaganda will still be necessary in the right places, for there are many who need the same kind of mental shaking that their grandfathers got during the Victorian and earlier period. But the un-Christian and anti-Christian godists, by their very development in moving away from the sectarian to a non-sectarian religious state of mind, have shown that they may be amenable to a more developed and more scientific appeal to reason.

I do not wish it to be assumed that I am saying this has not been done to some extent. It has.

I am simply pleading that the method should be applied more extensively, because there is more extensive scope for it than there formerly was among people as a whole. In writing for "The Freethinker," where one does not depend on the Editor for the pay check, it is possible to pay tribute without being suspected of plying the proverbial oil-can, and I want to emphasise that during the twenty years in which I have been a Freethinker in an active sense, and able to observe the movement with adult judgment, Mr. Chapman Cohen has done more than any other single individual to present the newer scientific case for Atheism. His modern statements of the Deterministic case, his constant use, year in and year out, of up-to-date scientific example, and particularly the way in which he has applied the telling facts of the youthful science of anthropology, have built up a structure of modern Atheism which, from a controversial point of view, would have been the joy of the

early pioneers could they have enjoyed its benefits, and which has been the dread of the modern enemies of Freethought.

It has been his policy not simply to teach the newer sciences, but to use them to make his case, and his examples have shown us how to use science scientifically—a quality which many scientists seem to lack, perhaps, to be charitable, because of their high specialisation. My own sense of debt to Chapman Cohen is a deep one, because I feel that his methods put me on to a very sound basis which, in propaganda and controversy, never leaves one high and dry, at the mercy of an opponent, nor stumped as to the next logical move in the case.

I forbid any editorial deletion of what I have just written, because it is essential to my next points that it should appear, even at the cost of modern blushes on eminent Atheistic cheeks.

F. J. CORINA.

(To be Concluded)

## "CHEAP" RELIGION

CLERICAL pronouncements have a way of being monotonous. The slow reiteration of platitudes cannot, at best, be really entertaining, and it is therefore refreshing to find something even a little new in the statements made by parsons or priests. I was consequently very interested to see, in a North-country newspaper, a quotation from the parish magazine of St. John's Church, Chester. The Rector, the Rev. A. W. G. Duffield, replies to critics (I am not sure who these extremely vocal critics are; I have never met any of them!) who say that some church customs are obsolete and should be abolished, so as to make it easier for "modern" men and women to worship and to take their place in the life of the Church. I wonder how many really "modern" people have any desire to take part in the life of the Church? But that comment is merely incidental.

What is of general interest to Freethinkers is the statement that Mr. Duffield makes in reply to these anonymous critics. Here it is:—

"This is an age of softness. Everything must be made easy and cheap. Restraints must go by the Board. There are no longer any morals to speak of. Divorce is made easier and easier. Youth is no longer told to obey, but to express itself freely. That which is cheap is never worth cherishing . . . It would be quite easy to popularise and cheapen religion, but the Church knows surely that if she did so the result would be useless either to God or man."

I do not know when I have read a short statement that contains more fallacies. "This is an age of softness!" Repeat that to our fighting men on any front, repeat it to the Civil Defence workers who have striven through fire and blitz to preserve the lives of their fellow-citizens, repeat it to factory workers, who have struggled long hours under difficult conditions for years. See what a welcome you will get from them, Mr. Duffield! And as to the cheapening of religion—well, we have cinema shows and dances, raffles and sales of work, jumble sales and dramatic societies—all these have been organised by the Church in a vain attempt to preserve its followers from the lure of Secularism. If all these things are not "cheapening" religion, one would like to know how this cheapening process could be brought about.

I said that it was refreshing to find something new in a priestly statement. But on second thoughts I am not at all sure that this is so. The stale old platitudes have acquired a certain amount of attractiveness by their very familiarity; but a purely stupid statement, like that which I have been discussing here, repels the thoughtful reader because of the way in which it destroys all coherence. Mr. Duffield will have to think again. His formula for preserving the vitality of the faith just will not work.

S. H.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SUNDAY CRICKET.

SIR,—Mr. Kent's experience with Sir Pelham Warner is similar to my own. Some of you older readers may remember that in 1908 I founded the Iconoclasts' Sunday Cricket and Tennis Club and advertised for members, in the "Freethinker." This club—a pioneer in its way—ran successfully up to the outbreak of war in 1914.

After that Sunday Cricket became a matter of common occurrence and I asked the assistant editor of the "Cricketer" if I could contribute an article on Sunday Cricket to that periodical. But he told me right away that Plum Warner was dead against Sunday games.

As a matter of fact the government of cricket in England should not be in the autocratic hands of the M.C.C. at all.

Now as to Hitler and God. Some time ago a little boy in the village told me that his schoolteacher had said that Hitler was a bad man because he did not believe in God.

I have listened to most of Hitler's speeches (per radio)—it was my job at one time—and he has made constant references to God. Der Herrgott (the Lord God) as the Germans call him. This expression is the counterpart of the French Le Bon Dieu.

Hitler is anything but an Atheist, and to give him his due, I am sure he really believes or used to believe that he was divinely inspired.—Yours, etc.,

H. E. LATIMER.

### PRAYER.

SIR,—A delusion being a false impression or opinion of something, how should one define the act of a person who, earnestly addressing himself to the empty air by way of prayer, thinks that there is a reasonable probability of his request being fulfilled?

I am prompted to ask this question as a result of witnessing the demeanour of the listeners, their sudden quietude and solemnity, at a recent broadcast of Public Prayer. At the time the subject did indeed appear to me to be somewhat of a mystery, which I forthwith set myself with beseeching gravity to examine, and the better to penetrate it I at first pursued my inquiries with what I will term "a religious eye." I presently noticed, however, that although the religious eye sees, or affects to see, it most unfortunately does not examine and that's where this method of inquiry is employed, as a noted N.S.S. speaker pointed out one evening on the Hyde Park platform: "The more one studies the mystery the more mysteriously mysterious the mystery becomes." This is like a dog chasing its own tail, failure being inherent in the very nature of the act itself.

Personally I now take the view that prayer is largely due to the desire of a person to shelve responsibility added of course to the working of the herd instinct, where the many follow blindly the few. Would it not be better for the individual if he were to mould his general conduct on a few of the wholesome maxims of which there are so many in our literature?—Yours, etc.,

J. EDWARDS.

## 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., Mr. J. McCABE: "The Old Year and the New."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street).—Sunday 3.30 p.m., Mr. E. W. ASHFORD: "War Guilt?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: Open Discussion.

Leeds Freethought Society (The Forum, 113, Park Lane, Leeds).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

## SIMPLY TRUSTING

By The Village Grocer

NOW I'm not one of those know-all folks, but I have been in the world for nearly seventy years. I don't know why I'm sure, but anyway its no good growing old if you don't grow wise. I've kept my eyes open and I've seen some funny things, and not being a parson or anything connected with their business, perhaps I've not shut my eyes when they would have done.

I've got some rummy customers come into my shop, but if they boast they are members of a church (and by the way, I've got a church next door to me), I keep my eyes and ears open, and if I give them a penny too much change they say I never look at the bill or never count my change, but when they are a penny short, well they happen then to look at the bill or count the change. Strange rather isn't it. The ordinary customer comes in and says: "Now then old 'un; I can't afford to pay for your lunch and beer to-day." But then you see they are the good folks being looked after. That's what they infer, and I suppose think. Are they?

One day I had an order to deliver to a rather big house a little way from my shop. It was a tidy order and was urgent. I placed it all in my basket and closed the shop and started on my errand. Walking through a lane I could hear someone singing and I soon sighted an elderly couple sitting on the grass.

They were a dejected couple singing at the top of their voices:—

Simply trusting every day,  
Trusting in a simple way,  
Even tho' my faith is small,  
I'm trusting Jesus that is all.

This interested me, so I stopped and put my basket down. The old girl immediately said: "Jim, look the good Lord has sent food." The man simply looked, and I don't think they had eaten any food for a day. They thought it was God sent. I decided to give them a cake from the basket and go back to make it good, for I pitied them. And then they told me their tale. The period was when the old folk had to be seventy to receive 5s. a week, but this old couple had not quite reached that age, and the old boy was unable to get work. Owing to his religious scruples he would not go on the parish or live in the workhouse, but simply trusted. They had struggled all their lives and had brought up two children, a son and a daughter.

The son had gone abroad as a young man to be a missionary. God blessed him and he had died of a fever. Had his father had the means to have sent him to college, he would have become a parson or a vicar, or even a bishop, and would have stayed here to convert the heathens in his own country, but not having the education necessary to be ordained he went abroad as a missionary.

The daughter had married a man who was a factory foreman, and she told them that they could come and live with her.

Well, the old folks hung on while they could, sold bits of furniture and other things till they were penniless, and then they started on their way to their daughter. They had about 18 miles to walk, and started with 1s. 6d. and plenty of faith. They had slept in a hedge all night and were just resting before the last three miles, and while they rested they sang their hymn. They were fully convinced that the little food I had given them was sent.

What a faith! An old couple having lived in a state of semi-poverty all their lives. Their son taken from them, their daughter, trying perhaps against the grain to help them, still believing in the faith, a faith that had brought them to such dire straits.

When I delivered the goods I told the good lady what had occurred. She immediately said: "Well, you don't expect me to pay for the cake do you?" I said: "No lady, it's my good deed for the day." If you want to see real faith, try to find it amongst the poorest, for that's where it is. Poverty and simplicity.

F. G. REEVES.

## YOU'RE GETTING OLD : A CONFESSION

I HAVE called myself a Freethinker for nearly fifty years. Am I a better Freethinker than I was in the period of "giddy" youth? Well, my convictions have certainly not changed but, to my shame be it said, my work in the cause has slackened in intensity. Sadly, under the reproving example of our amazing Editor. However, I am at the stool of repentance and it is with the purpose of influencing those of my contemporaries who are equally guilty to join me there that these reflections are written. Much too often is the excuse of age made for sheer laziness. And laziness and apathy are criminal in a time supremely pregnant with woe or weal for the future of mankind.

Old age damps down many ardencies but no Freethinker worthy of the name can afford to yield, without a struggle, to the common moral and mental obliterations that overcome people of normal character then. Wealth without wisdom, prejudice without reason, power without pity, speech without sincerity. We recognise these easily enough in others. Let us beware that the evil qualities do not take root unawares in our own natures. When a friend, fearing you are incurable after an outburst of angry unreason, shrugs his shoulders and comments, "you're getting old," take it as a sign of the writing on the wall and search within. Even if he happens to be half your age.

In such circumstances what should mark the Freethinker from the Christian? The Christian believes that he has an immortal "soul," but that does not seem to preserve his "mind" from developing the vice of intolerance (or worse) if he lives long enough in the faith. An eternity of intolerant Christians appears to be the goal our legislators are striving for. With such a monstrous conceit our Christian is inevitably selfish and censorious, and he is very very cunning should he be a modernist clergyman.

Now as our Editor has so often said neither Christians nor Freethinkers enjoy a monopoly of the vices, but those I have enumerated are less pardonable in the latter than the former. A Christian can be a good citizen in spite of his faith; a Freethinker should be one because of his principles. To return to a consideration of myself—a fascinating but not always edifying task, as Montaigne discovered (I would sentence every bigot to read his essays at least once a year)—I have realised that the older I get the more impatient I tend to be of views opposed to my own. That is undoubtedly one of the causes of the laziness I deplored at the commencement of these notes. Proud in the possession of my own "wisdom" I have turned my back with scorn on the multitude of fools. But the world is not as we would have it but as we make it. The raw ingredients may taste and smell indifferently, but the finished product is well worth the cooking.

A few weeks ago I found myself getting hot and bothered about an article in the "Freethinker" which similarly affected, judging by their letters of protest, some other readers. Old men are notorious for "writing to the papers" when they feel indignant about anything and I checked my impulse to write to your paper by the self-admonition, "You're getting old." After all what is in a word? At one time there were Freethinkers who winced at the appellation "infidel." Who cares now? So I hope that as I have made my confession and accepted a penance others, in the same spirit, will agree to differ amiably and remember the grand objective in the momentous days that lie ahead.

E. A. McDONALD.