

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Friends of God

WE think the name of Lord Elton will be well known to those who listen to the wireless—at least that was the way in which we made his acquaintance. We listened to him several times but were not impressed by what he had to say. To begin with he never failed to drag in religion whenever opportunity offered, and the man who cannot discuss social subjects without dragging religion in does not impress. Sociology is sufficiently developed to-day to stand on its own feet and does not need the backing of religious ideas that are now worn very thin. We are not adverse, we may say, to reading sermons or religious addresses, provided they have the proper surroundings. We can read and have read a fairly large number of religious lectures, but they belonged to a past that cannot be honestly revived to-day. Ex-Dean Inge once said that Christianity died with the establishment of the Copernican astronomy and that contained at least a truth. For the development of scientific theories weakened the hold theology had on the people. To-day theology follows science in a lame unwilling way that brings nothing but discredit.

My knowledge of Lord Elton's quality has been derived from newspapers and B.B.C. addresses, and these left me wondering whether he was a young man who had grown prematurely old, or an old man looking with a pessimistic eye on the younger life around him. In either case he impressed me as one who judged human nature without understanding it. He is, for example, dissatisfied with life as a natural fact, and can find no good in being born unless he can be guaranteed a continuance of life in another world. Were it not a very common plea of Christian preachers it might be set down as due to egotism. And yet when one considers the length of time during which I did not exist, and also judging from the history of the race the length of time that will elapse after I have ceased to be, it does verge on the impertinent to assert that the world is unsatisfactory unless I can live for ever and ever.

I grant that it is not easy for a man to think of himself as not existing. We throw ourselves into a past in which we had no part with comparative ease, and in the same way throw ourselves into the future; but we do not pretend that either assumption is more than an act of imagination, and it may develop into a tyrannical egotism. I think if we could get rid of our feeling about death, and, as Lucretius said, realise that death is death indeed, the fear of death upon which the Christian religion depends so much would cease to exist. We may have cause to fear life; we have none to fear death.

I am indebted to one of my readers, among those who send me cuttings from papers that I might otherwise not

see, for a copy of the "Church of England Newspaper" which contains an article by Lord Elton. The title of his article is "Planning and Eternity." I rather think that Lord Elton meant "Planning for Eternity," which one would take as advice how to make ready for residence in the Christian heaven. If that is not meant it is hard to see what it does mean. The old fashioned and more honest expression was published in five very familiar words: "Prepare to meet thy God," and that really meant something definite and has good New Testament authority. Apart from that the man who plans for eternity runs the risk of being set down as a megalomaniac. Hitler counted on a mere thousand years but had to put up with ten.

But it is quite clear that Lord Elton is one of those peculiar people who can only attach value to individual life if it puts before him an eternity of existence, ignoring the patent fact that we should all in our general outlook be quite out of place in a world that is radically different from this one. You cannot prepare for flying aeroplanes by taking lessons in swimming. You cannot continue our fundamental feelings and practices in a world where death does not exist, and where as the New Testament asserts there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage. Death must continue to play its part in life as life must continue to play its part in death. Love is not based upon the eternal life of the individual, it rather grows in depth out of the uncertainty of existence. Raise goodness to the highest conceivable level, reduce wrong to the lowest possible point; goodness and badness retain their functions in human life. How much a mother's love for her child is strengthened by the fear that disaster may overtake it? After all, individual things can be known to be what they are because there are differences. Lord Elton appears to believe that this world is a training ground in which to become fit for another field that is completely different. We agree that this is good Christian teaching, one of the foundation grounds of Christianity, but it is just one blazing torch of idiocy all the same.

Cannot Lord Elton see that he is actually either advocating the clearest of fallacies or he is up against the foundations of the historic Christian religion? In heaven there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage. Fatherhood and motherhood does not exist. Death, which plays its part in our development is unknown. The lure of sex ceases to exist. The laughter of children is not heard, it is replaced by the blowing of trumpets by unsexed humans; experience gathered on the earthly plane will be useless on the heavenly one. The dullness of heaven must extend even to "god" himself, for nothing can be more nauseous than having one's greatness chanted for ever without remission. No human being could stand it for a month. If the historic Christian theory be correct God has our deepest sympathy.

## A Better Britain

There is such a mass of misrepresentative pictures on life that we must by-pass them in order to keep these notes within a reasonable length. Just one sample of what we have in mind must be given. When we think of a better Britain, "we mean no more than a more prosperous Britain . . . founded upon the present statistics of irreligion, venereal disease, black-marketing, juvenile delinquency, theft, bigamy and divorce," etc., etc. Now if that were true an apt and historically correct retort would be that these things were encouraged and developed while the Christian religion was at its greatest. Every one of these evils flourished most when the Christian religion was strongest. If we are shocked at all these offences it is not because they have increased in numbers, but because of the secularising of life. We are more alert to the removable evils of social life than we were. The facts are within reach of anyone who cares to find them. People are not less honest than they were; children are not treated worse than they were. And if we are shocked at much that we see it is not because conditions are worse than they were, but because we are beginning to recognise that the possibility of better times lies in our hands. And, finally, this improvement both in life actual and life possible has marched step by step with the secularising of life.

For the time being we must let that matter rest in order to estimate Lord Elton's capacity for acting as an uplifter of life. The method may be rather cruel, but it is deserved cruelty, and if we have any use for that brutal Bible teaching "Spare the rod and spoil the child," it is only by substituting "adult" for "child." So we take first a specimen of Lord Elton as a philosopher:—

"The whole of our social and political outlook is conditioned by our general indifference to eternity. If man is immortal, the individual is, in the last resort, more important than the State, which is transient. But if man is not immortal, the State, which may survive for a thousand years, becomes of supreme importance."

And, he adds, that our aim should be to "make this life a fitting prologue to the next." I feel that it is only just to congratulate Lord Elton for having produced the finest example of muddled slush that we have met for some time. It is true that a man may plan in such a way that the result of the planning will be experienced long after he is dead. But that is merely a recognition that mankind grows in wisdom with the passing of generations, and others in this world take up the torch of progress where their predecessors dropped it. That is what we mean by progress, it is all we can mean by progress. But to speak of "progress" in the way Lord Elton does is pretty clear evidence that he has a very poor notion of the machinery involved. Man as an individual, enters this world with one capacity only, that of understanding and using the discoveries and advances made by previous generations. He enters a human group literally with nothing but that. He may add to what he inherits or he may take away from it. But his progress is determined in the long run by the quality of his inheritance and his capacity for using or wasting what has been given him. The sense of eternity has nothing to do with it.

As to man making this life a prologue to the next, that is just verbiage and not of a very high quality. It is not even a laudable ambition; for as we have said, if the other-world life is similar to this, man gains individually nothing by the translation, he merely repeats his experience. And if the new life is not identical with this one he will simply not fit in.

The sentence that man, as an individual, is greater than the human group, is pure nonsense. It is the group that perpetuates the advances that have been made; and those advances, in art and science, language and custom, await every human that is born. It is his inheritance. And that inheritance is entailed. Man has nothing to do with another world—save in his moments of misunderstanding or while enjoying a "pipe dream."

But there is one aspect of human development that Lord Elton faces with a very profound dislike. That is the period known as the Renaissance—literally a re-birth—which began in Europe somewhere about the twelfth century. He complains that "it led man increasingly to make of himself the measure of all things and has brought the world to its present pass. But one of its most pregnant falsehoods of this fundamental falsehood has been the steady decline of eternity, until to-day even Christians count this world more important than the next and think little of heaven and even of hell."

Now "Renaissance" stands for "Re-birth" and we are not surprised that one of the build-ups of Lord Elton should dislike the term and its consequence. Religiously, it "gives away the game." What was it that was reborn? If it is too much to say that the dead was brought to life, it did mean the revival in a way, so far as the Christian Church was concerned, of something that had been in a state of suspended animation. And naturally the Church did not like, and does not like to be reminded of it now. No one is more ready to publicise his ill-doings than a Christian, but they must be of the common, cheap kind. But the Renaissance that had been delayed brought to life a civilisation, a lust for science and philosophy, an affirmation of the power of the human intellect that no Christian Church can welcome.

The Renaissance meant a revival of the old Greek science and philosophy with all that the Church had carefully buried for nearly a thousand years, and which was let loose, with additions of Mohammedan and Jewish science and philosophy. Without the Renaissance the Church—the whole of the Christian Churches—might have been in a much more powerful position than they are to-day. They would not be pleading for a hearing; they would have ordered its teaching to be accepted. The sun might then still be travelling round the earth; miracles would be common; evolution would be a mere pipe-dream of irresponsible speculators. God would still be in his heaven and his worshippers would triumphantly walk the land and deny the freedom of man.

Well, well. Hitler asked for a thousand years and has had to be content with ten. The Church asked for eternity, and after a thousand years it has had to see its power shrinking time and again with a certainty that however delayed may be its fate, disintegration lies before it.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE TIMES OF JULIUS CÆSAR

PROFESSOR FERRERO'S biography of Cæsar (Unwin, 1934) displays an independence of outlook which is very striking. He contends that, after unremitting research among all the available documents relating to the period, that the unrestrained adulation of Julius and the heinousness of the conspirators who murdered him have been greatly misconceived by modern historians.

Among these he includes such eminent writers as Drümman, Mommsen and Drury. These Roman historians' interpretations of Cæsar's achievements Ferrero dismisses as romantic. He boldly asserts that the Roman State remained virtually a Republic throughout the first two centuries of our era. He avers that: "Cæsar did not destroy the Republic or create the imperial government; the latter was the slow creation of several generations who owed nothing to the achievement of Julius Cæsar. If Cæsar occupies a great place in history, it is not because he destroyed the Republic and founded the Empire but because he conquered Gaul. The conquest of Gaul was the beginning of European history."

Be this as it may, however, Ferrero's volume is indubitably a solid contribution to Roman history. His pen pictures of Marius, Sulla, Cicero, Pompey, Crassus, Lucullus, Brutus and the mighty Julius himself, among others of the leading personalities of the age, are strikingly drawn.

The self-indulgent life and the splendid poetic powers of Catullus are stressed. But Ferrero's appreciation of the stupendous achievement of the sincerely inspired Freethinking singer, Lucretius is more pronounced. The friend of Cicero, Lucretius in impassioned verse composed in a Latin which he patiently refined, penned an immortal masterpiece in which he entreated "his contemporaries to depose from their heavenly throne the false gods they had so long worshipped, and attempted single handed to win . . . with a Titanic aspiration of the intellect, the lordship and comprehension of the natural world."

As Ferrero intimates, Lucretius was a pioneer who moulded a crude Latin into an adequate instrument of verse. As Mrs. Browning said, he became the chief poet by the Tiber's side. Indeed his *De Natura* remains the greatest metrical masterpiece in Roman literature. All the joys and sorrows, the hopes, aspirations and despairs of life are engraven in this monumental poem. As Ferrero notes it portrays "the smiles that wreath green meadows in the springtime after rain, the gambolings of animals at pasture, the rushing of mighty tempests over field and forest, the calms and storms on the high seas, the puny efforts of men still in the animal stage to preserve and beautify their precarious existence, the horrors of plague and war, the folly of the fear of death, the burning thirst for love among all living creatures, the eternity and identity of the life which pulsates through the universe in all the myriad and mutable forces of animal being."

Again, declares Ferrero, Lucretius "stands for the heroic upward struggle of a reason which, in the sacred cause of truth, crushes indignantly beneath its feet the paltry superstitions of authority and religion. There are few greater gifts that Rome has bestowed upon mankind than the *De Natura* of Lucretius, which has found its way across the ages, while the trophies, the monuments and the glory of so many of Rome's generals have perished in the gulf of time."

Cæsar's "Commentaries," apart from his other writings, prove his distinguished standing as a writer, perhaps as high as that of Cicero himself. This Ferrero concedes and he acknowledges the pre-eminence of Cæsar as a military commander and that his versatility in some many respects was amazing and that he would have been a giant in any age of the world's history. But he denies that Cæsar was a great statesman. Indeed, the conditions of social, economic and industrial life in Rome were so extremely complicated that, even when the civil

wars were ended and Cæsar assumed supreme power, it appeared practically impossible for any man, however intellectually resourceful, to surmount these difficulties and dangers. Coupled with the perplexities of urban and rural life was the sullen obscurantist attitude of the Roman patricians and plutocrats who, when Cæsar was preparing to embark on his last military expedition for the conquest of Parthia, ended his career by his assassination. Many of the assassins were senators who had been his most virulent enemies but had been pardoned and forgiven by their magnanimous master.

Ferrero acknowledges that Cæsar's mind and character were realistic, and that he was as free from super-natural mysticism as Lucretius himself. One is prone to wonder whether, had Cæsar lived another decade, many if not most of his projected improvements would have been carried out to a successful conclusion. Julius was anxious to drain the pestilent Pontine Marshes, an important undertaking only recently accomplished. The Calendar his Egyptian astronomers successfully reformed. Among the many other improvements this Titan contemplated, as Ferrero acknowledges, was a drastic reconstruction of the whole machinery of administration. With peace established within the Republic, Cæsar looked forward to the formation of a government which, in Ferrero's words, "should be stable, beneficent and memorable to posterity, a government with three essential features in its programme, a large and generous policy towards the poor, a complete reorganisation, such as the nation rightly demanded of the whole disordered system of administration, and lastly, in the domain of foreign policy, some great and striking military achievement."

Cæsar successfully regulated the finances of the Republic and aspired towards the restoration of the former glories of Corinth, Carthage and other celebrated cities and to establish colonies on sites left derelict by the ravages of war. Nor was education neglected and schools on a generous scale were to be established and libraries created for the spread of culture and enlightenment among the people.

Cæsar's constitution towards the close of his career certainly showed signs of strain. Never robust, he had lived the lives of at least three men and had aged prematurely. Apparently, he now gave way to impatience, as his increasing responsibilities crowded upon him. Yet his mental powers and his marvellous capacity for sustained activity seemed as great as ever, and another ten years added to his life might probably have enabled him to confer many lasting benefits on his own and on later generations of mankind.

T. F. PALMER.

### A CONVERT TO CATHOLICISM

. . . About this time I met Charles Scott Moncrief (the translator of Proust). He was not what I should call a lovable character . . . He liked quarrelling on every pretext . . . Most of our quarrels were about religion. He was a convert to Catholicism. What a convert! More of a maniac than a Roman Catholic; indeed I often thought there was something not quite in order with his mental apparatus . . . I said: "A fellow who translates a book about Sodom and Gomorrah (the title of one of Proust's) written by a Jew deserves to go to Hell . . ." This kind of language used to infuriate him. He would cross himself five or six times in order to keep calm . . . During his last illness . . . he transferred himself to a nursing home run by nuns, a place that was full of holy images and pictures. He held a crucifix and a rosary in his hands and wore a string of pious medals round his neck. While kissing one or other of these, he asked after certain mutual friends of ours, but before we could tell him much about them he grew irritable . . . A few days later he was dead.—From "Adventures of a Bookseller" by G. Orioli.

## ACID DROPS

We never shared the praise of the late Archbishop of Canterbury. He was "smart" rather than deep. He gained praise as a preacher from those who were not theologians, and a reputation for philosophy among those who were not experts in it. The new Archbishop hardly appears capable of getting a first-class reputation in either direction. For example, take this gem. Writing in his own "Diocesan Gazette," he says, "Politics, like everything else, needs for its true direction the fulfilment of a true theology." Now what, in the name of all that is sensible, does that mean? Is it that one can only have good politics if he has a true theology? Put it that way and it is sheer idiocy. It means that Mohammedans, Jews, Hindoos, etc., to say nothing of the Chinese, the Russians and many others cannot have a good political theory because they have not the right kind of theology. And this is said by a man who receives £15,000 per year and a place in the House of Lords. What would he really get in the open intellectual or even political world? No wonder he believes that he is where he is through the grace of God. Normal humans would not stand for it.

The Rev. G. F. Braithwaite, Vicar of Wortley is perplexed. Judging from an article which appeared in the "Sheffield Star," he shows one way of getting better church attendances, and describes how this is done. He says that in his own town he arranged for a fine musical entertainment. Two special radio singers were engaged, also a choir with special music, etc. The result was a crowded house, and one man said to the Vicar as he went out that if the same kind of entertainment was provided every Sunday he would not miss a night. The same Vicar says that a church in Blackpool also tried an evening with a dance band, etc., and the place was full. But, poor man, he says that this is not religion. We feel sorry for the Vicar, but one cannot nurse a foolish creed without running the risk of being found out.

The Rev. C. K. N. Bardsly is trying to bring the people back to the Bible in a way which they can understand. We consider that to be the forerunner of disaster or as the New Testament has it, "Much learning hath made thee mad." According to the "Star" he has already made arrangements for a number of cinema performances, and has sold six hundred seats. We are not surprised but we should like someone to take a record of the grins on the faces of the audience when the angel, telling Joseph that the expected baby has come from the Holy Ghost, is shown.

"We noticed that the "Radio Times," in advertising a play, called it "The Story of the Execution of God." We do not think that kind of phrasing has ever been used, it would have shocked people not so very long ago. But whoever is responsible for the advertising it is quite wrong. In all the hundreds of crucified humans who have become God's, they were all mere humans until the death. It is that which transforms the sacrificed person into deity. God-making is quite a well-known and now a well understood process to students of anthropology. But perhaps Miss Sayers does not bother about anthropology. She has written many detective stories.

The Right Reverend W. F. Brown contributes some interesting reminiscences of the late Lord Alfred Douglas whose very strong devotion to Catholicism does not appear to have made him a very amiable character. His wife, who became a convert, told Mr. Brown that "she was positively terrified of him." He had a violent temper, and wrote Mr. Brown "letters of violent abuse," which proves at all events that Lord Alfred was never impressed with these "men of God," and was not afraid of saying so. Incidentally, Lady Douglas eventually wrote to Mr. Brown "that she felt unable to continue to be a practising Catholic"—so another convert went west.

There are two opposite stories that reach us from the "Front" concerning the situation of Christian belief among the Forces. One given us, with a blast of trumpets, is the eager-

ness with which the men gather round the preachers, the other that the majority do not care a damn for them—so far as their religion is concerned. No one who has any intimacy with the men themselves, and who understands the tactics of the parsonry will be misled by these parsonic news vendors. These tales follow every form of attempted conversion, but have got so stale that they deceive none whose mentality is capable of criticism.

But here is evidence, not for the first time, from one parson who is getting tired of a much-used Christian lie: the Rev. W. P. Wyle, just back from the Forces, who says in the "Evening News" of 29th March:—

"I have been told that a religious revival is just round the corner. I did not believe it when I first heard it, and I do not believe it now."

For that matter neither do those who circulate the tales. The clerical yarns are not intended for those who detect the difference between a lie and a truth. It is a case of lying for the sake of God.

Mr. Wyle goes a little further. He will have none of the nonsense that one may become a Christian by repeating a few ethical sentiments that were in action long before they were expressed in words. Mr. Wyle says that "The Christian religion does not mean good living, for many a Moslem and Atheist is better than you and me. The Christian religion means faith in Jesus as God and saviour." That is good, sound historical religious truth. It is real Christianity, and it is this thing that the best people respect in practice, even though they may not accept it in the theory. Bear this much in mind, and one begins to understand why, even with the best of Christians, there is so much humbug and falsity. Nowadays a man may believe in Christianity only in terms of his own intellectual foolishness. But you cannot have wisdom and sincerity together to-day where real religion is concerned.

The senior Divinity Master of Bede Collegiate School complains that the new Education Act will permit an Atheist to teach in schools while ordained preachers are not permitted. The reason for this is clear and justifiable. The Atheist is not in school to force his opinions down the throats of children. The Priest, as a priest, is there for that reason and for that reason alone. . . . Secondly, the Atheist is not forcing lessons on the children that the teacher does not understand, and that is, again, the main aim of the priest.

Trust religious folk for getting things upside down. A casual Christian reader of "The Freethinker" informs us that when a man knows God it alters his whole outlook on life. We do not doubt it. If we came to know God it would alter us. But whose fault is it that we do not know him? What we object to is second-hand knowledge, information that does not come from God to us, but to us via some wandering preacher, or well-paid Bishop, or some half-cracked evangelist. And all we have to say then is that we are where we are, and if God cares to make himself known he will be received with the utmost politeness. But we are not wasting time chasing him.

Meanwhile, assuming there to be a God, although we haven't the slightest idea of what he looks like, and therefore should not know him if we met him, we do not imagine, if he were only as decent as an ordinary human, we should expect him to recognise that we Atheists are the only ones that have treated him with decency. We have never said that earthquakes and epidemics, and even the present war, were God's way of getting level with mankind. We should not expect him to punish us because we have not burned incense to his honour. We may have blamed our fellow men for this or that, but we have never blamed God for what happens. When things are weighed, we suspect that if there is a God he will find that the only one who has treated him with fairness is the man who doesn't believe he exists in any other form but that born of a distorted imagination.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

- A. T. UNDERELL.—Many thanks for letter and cutting.
- H. E. LATIMER-VOIGHT.—Much obliged for sending on periodicals.
- J. HENSHAW.—Many thanks for letter and cutting.
- BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of 5s. 8d. from Edith Payne to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.
- E. TRASK.—Thanks for selections.
- "ALERT."—Next week.
- L. SANDERSON.—We will publish your suggestion. It is a good one if it can be carried out.
- A. HANSON.—Your question is not likely to be accepted. Certainly "Saints" have not been notorious for their humour. Jesus himself was not noted for his humour.
- S. FRANT.—We are continually impressing upon the public that anyone has the right to substitute an affirmation in place of the religious oath. A person who in a court of law wishes to affirm may do so on one of two grounds. Either that he has no religious belief, or that it is against his religious opinions. No other question should be asked, and none other should be answered.
- E. L. W.—Quite well, but could do with a little more leisure than we have. Thanks for good wishes.

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

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

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## SUGAR PLUMS

We were asked recently by an acquaintance, "Why do you so frequently find fault with people?" The answer was "Because it is the easiest and most successful method of driving home a lesson." It supplies a living example of the fault expressed. And abstract reasoning affects only a few. A concrete example comes within the scope of most people. For example, to say that religion leads men—and women—to commit offences of action and reasoning will, in the majority of cases, fall on deaf ears. A concrete example stands a better chance of attracting attention. Here it is.

We have just finished—that is a certain number of people have—celebrating the religious custom—not entirely Christian—of Easter. And the "Church Times," dealing with what it impudently and falsely called, the "first Easter," remarks that the Jews "defined their national attitude to the challenge of Christ. They chose their national policy. A few years of unrest followed, and then the stone of stumbling fell on them and ground them to powder."

Now that gives a fine example of Christian ethics—which are apparently not far removed from the ethics of Hitler; indeed, if the "Church Times" be correct—and we believe that they are, Christianly—Hitler has some ground for saying that when he treats the Jews as he has done he is just carrying out the wish of God. He is, in fact, God's instrument. God, it will be noted, was not content with punishing those who actually

ill-treated Jesus, but he continues the punishment century after century, and is not yet done. We think that all decent men and women ought to feel pleased at being able to regard the old story of Jesus as just religious fantasy.

By the way, we note that the B.B.C. reproduced Miss Sayers' semi-farcical burlesque of the resurrection of Jesus. The story is fantastical enough as it stands, but her introduction of a mob direct from the Old Kent Road of about seventy years ago makes the whole thing ridiculous. We "find no fault" with the play from our point of view. A ridiculous story masked by, presumably, a mode of speech of a couple of thousand years ago, did something to hide the real character of the superstition. To drop that mode of speech opens the way clear for unbelief. The Churches cannot feel very easy on the matter.

Consider the story of the birth of Jesus deprived of a form of speech that no one uses to-day, if they used it at any time, as it would appear in a modern newspaper:—

"A young lady of respectable parents was engaged to be married to a working carpenter. But to his dismay this carpenter, Joseph, found that his sweetheart was about to become a mother. His first impulse was to break off the arrangement with Mary, the young girl in question. But during the night he had a very curious dream. He dreamed that an angel came and informed that the expectant child had come from Heaven. No human male was connected with it. Joseph accepted the explanation, and the marriage came off in the usual manner."

There would be many broad smiles over the breakfast table, and in the morning trains to business.

To-day (April 15) Mr. J. V. Shortt will be the speaker in the Amo Hall, Abingdon Street, Blackpool. At 2.30 p.m. his subject will be "Evolution and Freethought," and at 6.30 p.m., "God versus Common Sense." This is part of the course of lectures arranged by the local N.S.S. Branch and deserves the support of all friends of the Freethought movement in the area. Mr. Shortt can be relied upon to carry out his part in an efficient and convincing manner.

Mr. C. McCall of Manchester will visit Blackburn to-day and lecture in the Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate, Blackburn, at 7 p.m., on "Christianity—Curse or Blessing." Mr. McCall has lectured in Blackburn before and this return visit will be much to the liking of members and friends of the Blackburn Branch N.S.S. We hear good reports of the speaker's platform ability.

We have before called attention to the fact that with the new Education Act, now law, most of the useful things it contains are to be put in operation when convenient, but the religious section operates at once. Lest we should be thought to be exaggerating, or prejudiced in the matter we quote the following from an Education officer writing in so said a journal as the "Observer." He says:—

"Classes are to be reduced in size—but not yet. The school-leaving age is to be raised—but not yet. All State education over the age of eleven is to be secondary education, and the present "senior" schools are to become "modern secondary" schools—but it is admitted that for the present the change will have to be only in name. Meanwhile, since little more than a third of our rural schools are reorganised, and since no school containing any children under eleven may become a "secondary" school, two-thirds of the senior children in the rural areas are to be deprived of even this nominal distinction. Local authorities are to prepare and submit schemes for adult education—but they will not be asked for them just yet. So the iceberg structure impressively grows, nine-tenths out of sight."

This officer says it will take at least fifty years to accomplish the educational plan outlined. In Russia they would take about three months. But the Russian government is not a religious government. In a few years in Russia, a population of eighty per cent. illiterates was converted into a population of 85 per cent. literate—and without the help of God.

## FREETHOUGHT PROPAGANDA

HAVING been mildly taken to task by Mr. A. Yates for my recent articles on Freethought propaganda, I feel that some elucidation of my viewpoint may be useful, not with a view to raising controversy, which would be merely stupid on so important a question, but rather to discuss aspects of a form of activity which is vital to the movement.

First let me confess to Mr. Yates that I have never been a Christian, so that "disbelief in the Bible" did not precede the way to Atheism for me. I was fortunate enough to begin life without the handicap of the Old Book in my hands, or a crucifix around my neck, my parents having wisely bundled the Bible overboard and checkmated God's Own Church before I was born. Instead of having to believe the Bible, then to learn to disbelieve it, I was able to treat it as any other book—that is, to test it on the value of the book itself, unsupported by the impressive weight of authority that accompanies the believing method. I preferred the *honest* fairy-tales of Grimm and Andersen, who at least never caused me the feelings of revulsion I experienced when, as a boy, I pursued the adventures of some of the Bible heroes and heroines.

As my "unofficial" method of getting to know the Bible led me to have a very poor opinion of it, I am willing to admit that I might be underrating the importance of Bible-smashing tactics in present day propaganda, and overestimating the value of the scientific approach—but I do not think so. For example, Mr. Yates seems to think I have completely discredited Bible-smashing tactics, but this is not the case. I actually said: "The older style of propaganda will still be necessary in the right places, for there are many who still need (it)." That surely concedes the whole point of Mr. Yates's article.

Granted that I advocated an extension of the scientific attack; but it was to cope with new conditions, and that does not commit me to discounting other methods where they may still be necessary.

Let me re-state my position. Bible-smashing has unquestionably driven millions of people out of the actual Christian fold, as comparative church attendance estimates over the past 50 years will show, but these tactics tend to leave the job in an unfinished state. Attacking Bible beliefs without the further pursuit of scientifically demonstrating the nature of godism in general, and the untenability of metaphysical ideas, leaves millions in what I called a "half-baked" condition.

It seems necessary (though regrettable) to have to emphasise in a Freethought discussion that Bible religion does more, when taught to children, than merely establish belief in the Bible gods; it establishes a fundamental idea of godism in the mind of the child, and even when the absurdity of the Bible, or Christianity, has been successfully demonstrated this godism tends to stick in the mind of the adult. It is this that accounts for those who, again to quote from my own articles, "disgusted by the Christian creed . . . yet retain a god problem."

Surely Freethought is something more than an antidote to Christianity. If it were not our job would be nearly finished. I have always thought of Freethought as the machinery for breaking down godism in all its forms, and fundamentally. If I am correct in this assumption it must follow that I am correct in my contention that Bible-smashing is less important to-day and the scientific approach more important. Let us test this statement.

Fifty years ago Christian churchgoers were far more numerous, and their beliefs needed to be attacked more directly on the grounds of the Biblical beliefs to which churchgoers subscribed. To-day it is estimated that only ten per cent. are churchgoers. Let us estimate Freethinkers (by which I mean people who have really shed their god ideas) at another ten per cent. This leaves

us 80 per cent. of people who may be classed as indifferentists—but only in so far as church attendance is concerned, for it is clear to any active Freethought worker that most of them believe "in a sort of a something which made us, the world, the universe, created life, set things in motion, keeps things going, governs everything, controls matter, is the supreme authority, divine spirit, etc., etc., etc."

Now here is the important point. Some of these people reject the literal Bible, and try to explain its absurdities by the accommodating terms "allegorical" and "symbolical." Others (perhaps the great majority) have so little interest in the Bible that they have neither read it nor studied it, do not want to attend church to have it interpreted, nor are they interested in the Freethought interpretation. I am bound to ask, then, how Bible-smashing can be effective either with people who find an "allegory" to counter every absurdity or untruth, or with those who have no interest in the Bible? Such tactics do not suit the cases.

But as all of these people have a basic godism in their mental make-ups an attack on that, by means of elementary instruction in the scientific attitude to life—Materialism if you will—may do some good, especially if coupled with instruction, sadly needed, in the social aspects of the god idea.

The attack on the Bible can usefully be employed, as I suggested, "in the right places, for those who still need it," that is, among actual churchgoers, who probably still accept the Bible as the Word of God, and need shaking up.

It may seem to Mr. Yates that people who, having discarded one god, "wander in a twilight . . . for another," deserve little sympathy; it may even be that the matter ought to be disposed of as "of no further concern"; but what it seems to be and what it ought to be do not alter what the position happens to be. People do move from Christianity and "wander in a twilight," and I feel that, on the whole, such are more deserving of attention because they have at least demonstrated a measure of scepticism. Contrary to Mr. Yates ("they must be reckoned of little account compared with the strongly entrenched and veteran forces of Christendom") I feel it is they, most of all, who obstruct our progress, for they form that half-baked mass of people whose relics of godism, and whose consequent lack of opposition to the entrenched minority, enable that minority to persist in its parasitical position on the backs of the community. If that indifferent mass could be stirred to a lively sceptical activity, or even a passive scepticism so long as it was not kept in a dark cupboard, but demonstrated when the minority reared its ugly head, the vested social interest of Christianity could be uprooted instantly. With a demonstrated scepticism on the part of the non-church-going public, our politicians would not have dared to give in to the religious caucus that has poisoned the new Education Bill.

But thumping the Bible will not stir up interest in those who have discarded the Bible. Something more is needed. Something more has been given, I agree. My claim is for more of that something more.

"Few cover the distance between Christianity and Atheism in a single stride," says Mr. Yates. Exactly. Most people linger in states of godism less crude than the literal Bible stage. Many young people to-day took up at the point at which their parents and teachers had previously arrived—with a god idea, but little respect for Bible nonsense. Hence the need for modifications in our propaganda. The elementary science taught in our schools, restricted though it be, is sufficient to laugh out of court the Bible stories that contradict secular teaching. The Christian indoctrination largely wears off, but God remains in various foggy forms—and we need a better fog lamp.

My aim in writing has been, not to argue, but to discuss seriously on the basis of my own propaganda experience. Propaganda methods are too important for mere argument. We must get somewhere with what we say. I have tried to do that

but I recognise that others may have different experiences, leading to different conclusions, and I am ever ready to learn, for what matters is the ultimate good of the movement, and not our personal predilections:

But in conclusion I will permit myself one platitude, though even in this I feel there is an important point. What is the use of holding the evolutionary interpretation of things, as against the godist idea, if we are not prepared to recognise that our own little system of activity must also evolve? And that is all I ask.

F. J. CORINA.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

The Church is open always for prayer—The house of "Mumble-Jumbo."

\* \* \*

Superstition is the rope on which the Christian suspends his reason.

\* \* \*

There is now an edition of the Bible which has been designed to be read as literature. This is a great compliment to the Bible.

\* \* \*

"For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God." A green-eyed god, presumably.

\* \* \*

"The meek shall inherit the earth"—to make a dictator's heaven.

\* \* \*

Christianity's debt to the earlier religions has never been acknowledged by this "going" concern.

\* \* \*

The doctrine of "original sin" is the origin of much sin.

\* \* \*

God & Son are Creators, Designers, Authors, Architects, Judges, Law-givers, Dealers in Miracles, Fortune-tellers, Kings, Faith-healers, Spiritualists, Soldiers, Pilots, Marriage-brokers, Teachers, Caterers, Illusionists, Ventriloquists, Lion-tamers, Night Watchmen, Shepherds, Bird-fanciers, Fishermen, Wine Merchants, Soul-renovators, etc.—Jacks of all trades, evidently.

\* \* \*

That "God is Love" is a theme beloved by Christians. Personally, we have been always enamoured of the god of Love.

\* \* \*

It is said that a man must have a god. On the contrary, it is God which must have a man.

\* \* \*

God and the Devil are the upper and nether millstones of Christianity, between which a poor soul gets ground.

\* \* \*

"If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him," said Voltaire. Certainly man has shown no lack of inventive genius in devising instruments for his own destruction, and gods must be reckoned among the instruments.

\* \* \*

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." Dean Swift said that man takes a torch when he goes forth to war, but when he creates life he blows out the light. Oh dear, Dean, this is a subject for reflection!

\* \* \*

"Know thyself," said the philosopher. "Know God," said the priest. In truth, the philosopher points to a subject concerning which you are bound to learn something.

The savour of unctiousness is nauseating in the man who is wrapped up in his Saviour.

\* \* \*

When the God-fearing business man takes stock of his business, God is left out of account.

\* \* \*

The core of Christianity contains the seed of self-righteousness—the genesis of spiritual pride, humbug and hypocrisy.

\* \* \*

The parson's hope—"Suffer the little children to come unto me."

\* \* \*

A man and his religion are not easily parted.

\* \* \*

It is said that a man is known by the company he keeps. Similarly, the company is known by the god it keeps.

\* \* \*

It is significant that Devil and Evil are synonymous terms; likewise God and Good. Perhaps there is more in this than meets the eye.

S. GORDON HOGG.

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,—Freethinkers in this so-called Christian country may well pose the question: Do those who address their prayers for victory in the war which has been forced upon Great Britain and her Allies by one aggressive nation, place any confidence in the Divine help prayed for, unless they can back petitions with guns? Prayer may be efficient, or sufficient for use in churches which have not been bombed, but how about those which in spite of prayers have been bombed?—Yours, etc.,

REGULAR READER.

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., A. D. HOWELL-SMITT, B.A.: "The Humanisation of Ethics."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY will lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Building, College Square).—Sunday, April 22, 7.30 p.m., lecture and debate.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. COLIN McCALL: "Christianity—Curse or Blessing?"

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (Amo Hall, Abingdon Street).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m., Mr. J. V. SMOYTT: "Evolution and Freethought." At 6.30 p.m., "God versus Common Sense."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. E. STOCKDALE: "This International Money Business."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. STEFANI: "The Case for Survival."

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

## BELFAST WOMEN AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

(Concluded from page 132)

CAN'T you catch yourselves on, you brave Ulster men who have boasted of "No surrender" and "Not an inch"? The new world is waiting for your children and a glorious life of culture, of leisure and travel and all good and beautiful things could be theirs. But already the ground is being prepared for you and yours, and you are being warned by the ideology of blood, sweat and tears that life will be stern, that you must work hard and that you must not expect ease for many years after the industrial war re-commences. Holy Mackerel, can you not see that that view is put forward by those who have never worked and never wanted for anything? Brother, when you're told "we must all make sacrifices" make up your mind you're going to be sacrificed. Lady Londonderry was permitted to give her views lately in the Press on religious education and right well did she give the game away. We all know, she said, how important are the first seven years of a child's life. Yes, the old Jesuits, and the new psychologists are right. Those plastic, formative seven years! Kittens are born blind; in seven days their eyes are open for their lifetime. Children are born with their eyes open; in seven years we suffer them to be blinded. Oh, it matters not, whether the school-leaving age is raised to 17, or even 70, if they are pithed, chloroformed, plugged, doped and fozzled up to the age of seven, they will never be rational beings. Oh, ye communists and socialists, with your vaunted materialistic outlook, and your unscientific practice. For you live in Utopia if you think that when the Gospel of Mark has been imbedded in the unconscious mind of your child he will lightly turn to Marx, Groucho probably but not Karl. Last Christmas day I saw a fond father out with his little child. The boy had a tommy-gun, a sword, two revolvers, a Union Jack, a belt of cartridges distributed about his person. I was grieved that he had neither parachute nor hand grenade, but maybe the baby had them at home while his loving mother was showing him how to drop bombs out of his cot.

Hardly entreated communionist, I must not be too hard with you. If you saw a teacher screwing the arm of a child you would soon stop the miscreant.

But, alas, you are a victim of crooked teaching and meek submission. Sure, didn't Billy McCullough tell us the Communist was the only party to support religion? Angels and spinsters of disgrace offend us! I can no more. For I see clearly. A bruised arm will leave but little evil effect but a twisted mind is irrevocably tragic. Yet you working men and women not only sanction this degrading domination of helpless infants by superstition and Chauvinism but, while eternally talking of Unity among workers, deny to militant Freethought the help that would be very valuable in their work of tearing up the roots of slavery. I was a slave in childhood. I am neither English nor Irish, but the child of an oppressed race. Deliverance came to me in youth—I was liberated. Yes, truly and well Liberated by Germans, who did their stuff with great thoroughness. Feuerbach, Hegel, Heine, Buchner, Haeckel. These intellectual giants tore the ruts out of my filthy fancies.

Friends, I will now turn to Shakespeare. Mercutio, mortally wounded in the quarrel of others, cries "A plague o' both your houses." Now, Montague and Capulet were enemies and Mercutio's death was a misadventure. But Professor Biggart and Mrs. Parker are not enemies (of each other I mean) and they mean no physical harm to young Mercutio. On the contrary they would like to see the children of the people grow up strong and fearless. For it is deplorable that if the birth rate continues to fall, there may be a shortage of males to mate with Ten-ton Tessies in the elevating work of extracting entrails from the

healthy Europeans. In the name of Gentle Jesus of course. But make no mistake, comrades. This University debate was only a sham fight. The women were as Sir Boyle Roche would put it, throwing a red herring in our eyes. But I detected the odour of a rodent and sought a cleaner atmosphere.

The philosophy of Polybius still reigns. There is no "problem of education" for the Maloners. No scholarships needed, no brains, no aptitude. You may have ability but you don't need it, if only your parents have the dough. But when those people who have no problems of their own manifest a great interest in the future of "the people," it is not to liberate, but to keep them in "their proper place." And Mumbo-Jumbo is the correct dope. Oh, ye rationalist teachers, ye who read (in secret) the Thinker's Library, yet teach the little ones noble lies for a bowl of porridge, what of your immortal souls? You take a trusting child by the hand, you lead him mentally down the garden with Adam in Eden. So that, later, he may be led up the garden by Anthony Eden for the next war when the ash of the Marlborough cigar has grown cold. Dope, teacher, dope the boys all, at Dope-the-boys Hall. Christ, Chauvin, Churchill! Love one another, Land of Hope and Glory; tear the guts out of the filthy foreigners.

Enter Mrs. Mop.

"I've brought this for you, sir."

"Oh, isn't that nice? What is it, Mrs. Mop?"

"It's a University Women's pie."

"I thought it looked as if something had been left out. What's it made of, Mrs. Mop?"

"Tripe and cod, sir."

"Yes, nifty and fishy."

"Well, T.T.F.N."

"A Freethinker's good night, Mrs. Mop. T.G.I.A.A."

"What's that, sir?"

"Thank God, I'm an Atheist!"

J. EFFEL.

### AN UNNECESSARY GOD

The scientific interpretation of natural phenomena has made the interest in God more remote, God's existence more problematical, and even the idea of God unnecessary. Mathematics and physics are making it increasingly difficult to assign a place for God in our co-ordinations and constructions of the universe, and the necessity of positing a first cause or of conceiving a designer, a necessity which seemed *prima facie* obvious to a pre-scientific generation, does not exist for us. (Wilson Carr: "Changing Backgrounds in Religion and Science," 1927. Page 74.)

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