

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### God, Man and the War

WE are writing these notes while everyone is anxiously awaiting the news that Germany has surrendered. Every arrangement has been made to "celebrate": the public-houses are to have a larger quantity of beer and the Prime Minister has asked all the churches to open their doors and return thanks to God for our "victory." We fancy that this piece of advice is given with an eye on the coming General Election rather than an expression of Mr. Churchill's profound religious feeling. But votes are votes, and to get the religious vote on the side of A or B or C is very important for political success. After all, votes are votes, and two of them will overcome one without the slightest regard for their ethical or social value. Certain it is, from the wider point of view, that religion has been one of the casualties of the war. No war has started with a greater outburst of "the trumpets of the Lord," and never was the futility of the trumpeting made more obvious. To the common man it would seem that God should have done his best to prevent the war, or if the war escaped his notice, some very plain exhibition of his interference—on our side, of course—should have occurred. A deity who stands looking on while the terrible brutality of the German Nazis manifested itself seems to fall short of what sense and decency would expect. Still, the combination of more beer and an outbreak of thanks to God for giving us victory may go well together. There are many forms of intoxication, and a combination of all forms is a very powerful thing. Still, there seems to be something wrong in a deity who stands, or sits, idly by watching the terrors of the German prisons and then receiving thanks from his children for ending the war after five years of bloodshed, brutality and disaster. Returning thanks to God in the present situation merely emphasises that both camels and Christians take their burdens kneeling.

### An Inquiry—and Answer

In this five years of war we have received many letters from officers and privates on the question of religion. One of them, from an obviously educated and thoughtful officer, is worthy of notice, not because he is a full-blown Atheist, but because of his impartiality in weighing-up the situation from a semi-religious point of view. He tells me that he has been reading "The Freethinker" for about two years, and gives me his opinion of the religious position as he sees it. I must add that he has been in the fighting line for over three years. His general summary of the situation is that if the state of religion at home is no better than it is abroad, the outlook for the Churches is very black indeed: as he puts it, there is likely to be a slump in the "salvation market." I place greater value in his communications—I have had three letters from him—because he appears to be

feeling his way to find some solid ground. Concerning external things, his mind seems to be quite clear. It is—and I agree with him—not justifiable to approach a large majority of those clergymen who are with the Forces in any other way than being made up of honest men who really believe what they say. Taking them as a body, they are, he says, "very likeable," and they seem, on the whole, to get on very well with the men. But—he emphasises the statement—"it is the man, not the preacher, they respect." The majority of the clergy in the Forces are careful enough, or artful enough, to appreciate the situation, and most of them keep their religion in the background.

I think we may take this as a very fair summary of the situation. It seems to fall into line with what one knows of the general quality of human nature. Personally, we have always insisted that the evil done by religion is not that it attracts bad characters to the fold, but that it distorts the thought and enlists the services of good ones. After all, the opinions of the majority of people are not formed by logic. They imagine they have adopted an opinion when, in reality it is the opinion that usually adopts them. Man is always more or less a reasoning animal, but he is only here and there a logical one. Consider, for example, the vile conditions in which large numbers of people lived in East London. This had been going on for generations. There had been many attempts and charitable organisations to "help" the poor. Royalty had also visited—by arrangement—the poor, and came away impressed, not by the terrible conditions in which people lived, but by their bravery and contentment. Then Royalty went home, the poor remained poor, and charity continued to function where the "Rights of man" should have been in operation.

Yet when, thanks to German bombs, these hovels were brought into the light, and recognised for what they were. Some of the men engaged in digging out bodies and living persons, the very men who were risking their lives, were heard to say that but for the loss of life we ought to thank the German bombers for what they had done. There had been Royal Commissions, relief plans—to keep people contented rather than to rouse discontent in circumstances where contentment was almost a crime, but the evil went on. People saw without seeing all that was immediately before their eyes.

And so I take it to be the case with religion. Our knowledge concerning the origination and dissipation of gods is now in all its essential features complete. Modern science does not say gods do not exist. On the contrary, it tells us how they came into existence and how they are ultimately dissipated. The gods have all the reality that the visions of a dipsomaniac has; all the reality that Martin Luther had when devils came singing in his ears. But as with these and kindred cases, the gods disappear the moment they are understood. They are such timid creatures that they cannot, they dare not, linger in places

or with people who do not recognise their presence. If only believers in gods had sufficient wit to recognise that the quality of "true" gods is on a level with Luther's ear-infecting demons, or the curious biological experiences of a dipsomaniac, the reign of the gods would come to an end.

### The Burden of God

I think now I had better confine my remaining space to a consideration of those who wonder what God is doing, or who will join in thanking God for bringing us victory—after five years of war, when in agreement with religious belief he might have prevented the war. We are told that if people will act in a particular manner they must expect the consequences to be of a particular kind. But that does not meet the case. Aristotle said, over two thousand years ago, that man will act as he believes he is acting to his own interests. That is true, whatever quality that action may entail. Of course, what a man does consciously he plans to do. That is a truism. But, on the lines of religious belief, God can direct people's aims as well for good as for bad. If God can bring this war to an end in 1945, why can he not have stopped it in 1939? When Chamberlain returned from visiting Hitler, brandishing a piece of paper, which everyone with honest working brains knew was not worth the price of a pre-war box of matches, why did not God see to it that the war did not take place? Really, even religious docility and stupidity should have its limits.

It is said that God did not wish men to act as they do act. Maybe, but he must—on the Christian theory that not a sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledge—have expected them to act as they did. As things have been running, it looks as though God's plan seems to be of the nature of a trap. Unless a man is a politician or a fool, he will not say that this world war was *entirely* the work of one man, or even a handful of men in one country. They do but fire a bomb; its manufacturing covers a much larger area. If the Christian philosophy be right, then we poor mortals only follow a path that has been traced for us by "Providence." Almighty love supported by Almighty power should have made human nature of a kind that disasters consequent on human misjudgment would never occur. It is idle to blame conditions. God made the conditions; man—if Christianity be true—is one of the conditions. For good or ill the responsibility for what goes on in the world belongs to God. If Christianity be true, the world is God's world. A better plan would have made a better world. After all, man is trying to make a better world. Let us hope that he does not bring God into partnership.

It is sometimes said that the pain and misfortune we encounter is part of our training, our discipline, that danger brings courage, suffering creates sympathy, and so forth. Well, we agree that is as good apology as many others, but it certainly puts the sweater, the land-grabber, the man or country who helps to create a war, on a much higher level than we should have done. Those who dilate on the purifying quality of suffering should look with reverence to Hitler, and all his immediate crowd, for he has raised pity to a greater height than is usual by the exposure of the German prisons for political prisoners.

An old friend of mine was in the habit of saying of the Deity, "Thank God he doesn't exist." After all, the charm

of the world is that it is not infested by beings who can disturb man in all his actions, and frustrate his best endeavours. Nature is not conscious, neither is it intelligent. Praise and blame, save as figures of speech, are meaningless where nature is concerned. It is not we who create the problem of creation or the mystery of life and death. Nature cares no more for the life of man than it does for the demise of a rabbit. If God exists, we might have to grant him the quality of power, and it is left for man to display sympathy, wisdom and brotherhood. In these qualities man is greater than any God who was ever fashioned. On the Theistic line it is man who corrects the blunders of deity. He makes habitable the places of the earth that God neglected; discovers cures for diseases that God invented. The enduring fact in our existence is not the fatherhood of God but the brotherhood of man.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### THE STRUGGLE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

MR. W. G. ADDISON'S "Religious Equality in Modern England," 1714-1914 (S.P.C.K., 1944, 8s. 6d.) is a penetrating study of this important subject. Although several noteworthy reformers remain unmentioned, his volume is scrupulously fair throughout, and its author is a genuine progressive. Paine, Priestley, Place, the two Mills and Bradlaugh are honourably remembered, so the work merits the attention of all those interested in the history and maintenance of religious freedom.

Indirectly from Britain, for both France and America were inspired by the Deistic thinkers of England, the foundations of a fuller freedom of thought and expression were well and truly laid in 18th century Paris and the New World Republic. As our author observes: "In 1787 the Constitution of the United States of America (Article VI.) explicitly provided that 'no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the United States,' while the First Amendment to that Constitution (1791) prohibits impartially the establishment of religion and any abridgement of the free exercise of religion. On that basis—of no patronage and no persecution—the American Republic began and continued." Yet even there, as Addison admits, Catholics and Mormons had still to struggle for freedom and he is obviously aware that openly avowed Free-thought is still stigmatised by semi-educated religious sectarians.

The Toleration Act (William and Mary, 1689) relieved Dissenters from certain disabilities but, from our modern standpoint, the measure was a pitiful concession. The Test and Corporation Acts were not repealed until a century later, while Unitarians and Papists were excluded from the reliefs afforded by the Toleration Act and suffered serious hardships. Moreover, the Anglican reaction under Anne secured the enactment of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Bills. Now, "No Dissenter while holding public office might attend a meeting house; nor could he teach nor own a school without episcopal licence."

The agitation against intolerance continued through the reign of George I. and his successor, but the Whig statesmen who favoured ameliorative legislation were intimidated by an aggressive clergy and its excitable flocks. Even when the Methodist Movement became powerful, nearly all its influence was exerted in support of intolerance, despite the fact that Fox, Pitt and Burke, with other leading politicians were willing to ameliorate repressive measures. As Addison avers, the Methodist protagonists proved obscurantist in the matter. "Romaine," he writes "preached against the impiety of Jewish naturalisation; John Wesley joined Scott and the evangelical clergy in resisting relief to Roman Catholics and in fostering popular anti-Popery. On the more momentous issue of the American Secession the record is equally unsatisfactory." Both the Methodists and Evangelicals

ranged themselves in the ranks of those who advocated coercion of the American "rebels," "and this," deploras our author, "at a time and on an issue which men like Pitt, Fox and Burke declared recalled the glorious days of Puritan opposition to tyranny and despotism—save that the Hampdens and Cromwells were now on the other side of the Atlantic!"

It is a melancholy truth that the ultra-pious were so painfully concerned with the prospects of their existence after death that they seemed incapable of conceiving any rational notion of justice in this vale of tears. As Hazlitt sarcastically inquired: "What have the 'Saints' to do with civil or religious freedom." They and their disciples attached no serious importance to either.

The Methodist revival inflamed the truculence of the illiterate and semi-pious populace. If, at a later time, seceding Wesleyites played a part in the reformist movements of Chartism and Radicalism, in preceding generations the popular element was utterly opposed to enlightenment. When no organised police force existed, even an outbreak of apprentices was feared. As Addison urges: "The rulers in Church and State had to exercise caution in arousing the ire of a populace ignorant enough to see in an alteration in the calendar an impious papal plot to overthrow the Constitution."

The man in the street—it is to be feared that he was often enough in the ale-house or gin-shop—combined a normal indifference to the disciplines of society and religion with a frenzied devotion to the defence of the faith of his fathers; in a crisis he was transformed into a formidable exponent of Tory-Anglicism at its worst." This verity was glaringly exemplified during the Gordon Riots in 1780 when the no-Popery mob terrorised London by burning and looting; a splendid description of which is to be found in Dickens' fine novel, "Barnaby Rudge."

The alarm occasioned by the French Revolution was exploited by reactionary politicians to stifle advanced opinions. Some publicists such as Burke, were genuinely disconcerted by the tragic events in Paris and allowed their emotions to override their reason. Paine and Priestley defended the Revolution; the former in his "Rights of Man"; and the latter, in his "Letters to Burke," emphasised, as Addison recalls, "Burke's obvious ignorance not only of the course of ecclesiastical history, but of the actual concrete situation out of which the Revolution arose. In a pamphlet war which produced many memorable metaphors, the prize perhaps falls to Paine's famous dictum, that in his sympathy for the French emigres Burke pitied the plumage but forgot the dying bird. 'The Rights of Man' sold by the thousand, though unlike Burke's 'Reflections' it did not win the approval of George III."

As it was easy for clerical and other obscurantists to inflame the passions of the crowd, they encouraged a counter-Revolution in the popular mind. Paine was burned in effigy and Dr. Priestley's residence with its fine library and laboratory was destroyed by a Birmingham mob yelling "Down with the abettors of the French Revolution."

But when, in a few years, the Industrial Revolution and the marked improvements in husbandry and stock-breeding had brought about so many changes, broader views began to prevail. Then came the "hungry forties," the rise of the Chartist movement with the spread of Freethought among the masses; and the idea of progress was restored. Indeed, preceding barbarities such as that of Peterloo in 1819, for which the magistrates were mainly responsible and the Parliamentary prohibition of "seditious" gatherings and "blasphemous libels" rallied the more liberal minded public to the cause of reform.

As Addison notes: "In 1820 Robert Owen followed William Cobbett in his flight to America and the regime of Old Corruption reached its climax in the suspension of Habeas Corpus. The land of the free lost its birthright." Malefactors and constitutional reformers were equally criminal in the eyes of Sidmouth, Eldon and other ministerial diehards. Our author pungently observes that: "In Wiltshire Sidmouth's spies informed on Luddites and Baptists just as thirty years later Home Office

inspectors confused Methodists and Chartists. The disciples of Tom Paine, or of Priestley and Price, Deists and Dissenters, Roman Catholics and Friends of the People, youthful poets and citizen members of the London Correspondence Society, were promiscuously lumped together and execrated as traitors to their country, offenders against civilisation and enemies of true religion."

The Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and the Catholic Relief Act of the following year; Church Rates and nearly all the other matters relating to the advance towards religious equality are reviewed in Addison's excellent volume. The chapters dealing with University Reform and the struggle of educational equality are important. As our author avers, the evils forecasted by the opponents of University rationalisation have never arrived. The ending, he urges, "of the Universities as ecclesiastical corporations has not in fact led to the decline of theological or general scholarship and research, while no proctor at either University has as yet been heard to suggest that the manners and morals of the undergraduates have suffered by reason of the abolition of subscription, declaration and oaths."

T. F. PALMER.

## SPIRITS, GODS, AND MORAL CODES

### A Letter to Isobel

DEAR Isobel.—It was a nice compliment to ask me what I thought about the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule as a "moral code" for a young person just reaching adult years. Knowing me to be an opponent of religion, and you having several religious friends who profess to be expert in such matters, it was also a compliment to yourself, as it indicated a breadth of mind that is commendable in young people.

I am afraid I shall disappoint you in your quest for a "moral code," however, because I have no rigid code to offer. I also think I may shock you when I say that I don't believe in them when they have their origin in religion, and I am always suspicious of them in any case, because rigid codes break down in practice.

Morality is not a fixed and permanent quality, and cannot be measured in fixed terms; nor can behaviour be practised according to fixed laws. Religious people have always tried to work fixed moral codes according to their religious ideas—that is to say, they have tried to live life on the basis of their religious beliefs—and the history of such efforts is one of gross failure, because religious ideas never had behind them the backing of scientific truth. Religious ideas are always based on lack of knowledge. They are the ideas that man possesses about things he cannot explain, and when he can explain these things they cease to be religious speculations, and become secular knowledge.

In the case of the primitive religions there was more sense in and more excuse for the system of taboos than in modern religions. The savage knew that some things that happened were good for him and some were bad for him, and although he wrongly attributed good and bad happenings to good and bad spirits, because he did not know the real causes, he acted logically in trying to observe a code of taboos because his experience showed him, on the whole, that it paid him to do so. Pleasing the spirits was, indeed, a very complicated business for the savage, and, in the absence of real knowledge of causes and effects, taboos, aimed at pleasing the spirits, or at avoiding their anger, did some good because they often kept man out of danger. In other words, although they wrongly diagnosed the causes of trouble when they blamed spirits, they learnt how to avoid the effects. Of course, the things they learnt would have worked just as well without spirits as with them—but they didn't know that.

In the case of Christianity, however, we do know that. We know that a shell made by an Atheist, and fired in this war,

will be just as effective as a shell made by a Christian who prayed for it to be a good shell. We know that an Atheist doctor has just the same chances of curing a patient as one who believes in God. And we know, also, that a Roman Catholic, wearing round his neck a charm that has been blessed by the Bishop, has just as much chance of being knocked down by a bus as the man who never wore a charm in his life.

That is what makes Christianity so stupid. Although everybody knows, or ought to know, that the coming of rain depends upon purely material factors—for instance, that it can't rain without clouds, and that even with clouds the wind can bring or keep off the rain and that hills and mountains influence where the rain will fall—Christians still have official prayers to God for rain. It is as stupid as praying for sixteen hours of daylight at the winter solstice, when we know there can only be about eight hours daylight.

Now to return to the moral code. Christianity is just as stupid in this connection. The Christian code was fashioned, like that of early savages, with a view to pleasing the big spirit, called God, in which the people of that time believed. Consequently, such a code, which exists in the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and I would add, the Sermon on the Mount, is unsound to-day because it seeks to guide human conduct according to the ideas and the times (at the very least 2,000 years old) of the people who invented God, and sought to please him.

Let me put it another way. If a primitive savage invented a god, and wished to please him, he would behave according to ideas which pleased himself, because his own feelings would be the only standard by which he could judge what would please or displease. No Christian would agree that we should set our standards to-day by such a savage's primitive ideas—but most Christians are taught standards based on the very out-of-date ideas of the people who lived 2,000 years ago in Mediterranean and semi-oriental regions. They would revolt at accepting moral principles from the ancient Britons, say, yet they accept them from the ancient Israelites and Mediterraneans. Moses is supposed to have received "eternal laws" direct from God on a mountain side, and Christ is supposed to have been the mouthpiece of God, or God himself, according to some Christians. They can't even agree among themselves, by the way about these questions, which shows how unreliable god ideas can be, and how little positive help they can give. God and Jesus always were a bundle of trouble to those who believed in them.

Now the early Christians had a hard time in the economic sense, and suffered persecution, and this made the idea of a happy life in a world hereafter seem a very pleasing prospect. So much so that it became the main idea of Christianity, and the Christian leaders gave it a fine build-up in the minds of their followers. To-day we call that sort of thing wishful thinking—and wishful thinking can easily become fanatical belief. But wishful thinking can do more than make unhappy people hopeful for a better life hereafter. It can keep them contented with a miserable life here, and put a useful weapon into the hands of bad rulers and governments. That is just what happened. A ritual was built up around this idea of eternal life. Certain things had to be done in certain ways, and certain things had not to be done, to make sure of enjoying the life hereafter, and as a supplement to the pleasant promises there were also unpleasant threats—breach of the code meant punishment in hell and purgatory.

When the Church eventually became a great governing power these ideas were used to keep the people satisfied with their lot, and when governing power passed out of the hands of the churches owing to quarrels among the ruling Christians, secular governments and rulers always kept on good terms with Christianity because of the power it gave them over the people. The "moral code" of Christianity is used even to the present day in the

hope that people will pay more attention to the idea of the next world than to the realities of this world.

But if one believes that this is the only life we have (and there is no evidence to the contrary) and that we ought to get the very best out of it for all who have to make the journey, then the Christian moral outlook is a very poor thing indeed. In fact, it is not morality at all, for it concerns one's own soul and a future life, whereas morality must concern this life, and must include others as well as ourselves.

True, some Christians would resent this interpretation, but that is because they have advanced in outlook beyond their primitive code or the belief on which it is founded. In other words, they have de-coded their code. Which brings us to an important point.

It is this need for the de-coding of fixed codes by more enlightened people that shows how codes obstruct when they are out of date, and how morality is flexible—as flexible as the humanity which fashions it anew from time to time in defiance of all the gods that ever lived in the mind of man.

Let me put it this way. You cannot measure running water with a yardstick; you require the flexible mechanism of a meter which can give varying judgments to suit the varying conditions of pressure, volume, and other qualities. Neither can you measure humanity with the Ten Foot Commandment Rule, or the rigid Golden Rule. You need the flexible instruments of knowledge and understanding if you are truly to assess the varying forms of human behaviour.

Love Thy Neighbour is often quoted as an example of Christian moral teaching, but it breaks down at once in practice. How can you love your neighbour if you know that he beats his wife and neglects his children? The proposition is absurd. To love one's neighbour in the lonelier conditions of primitive life might have been more easy than now, but who to-day could possibly have such a surfeit of this feeling as to bestow it upon everyone even in the same street? The Christian code is full of similar absurdities and impossibilities.

True morality demands no more than that we shall recognise the rights and need of our neighbours; that they may live their own lives without our slobbering over them with a hypocritical pretence of love which has no social value at all, nor any biological necessity. This fact had been recognised by man, and had become fundamental in society, long before Christianity spoilt the business by dodifying it—an act which, by empancising a relationship that already existed (neighbourliness) and demanding an impossible addition (love) probably created the jealousies that are so pronounced to-day among truly Christian neighbours.

So far in this letter I have been critical of the "morality" that is offered you by Christianity. I have also tried to be instructive. But Freethinkers are sometimes accused of being destructive, so let me conclude by offering to you, not a rule, nor a code, but a precept of behaviour which I think is more constructive than any "Thou Shalt Not" or "Thus Saith the Lord" of Christianity.

Too many people, often well-meaning, but misled by religious codes, have brought misery to the world by going about interfering with others because they thought they were "doing good." Don't worry much about "doing good" to people, because in the limited number of cases open to the personal attention of yourself, as a single human being, you might frequently become a nuisance, or even a danger. Pay attention rather to the principle of doing no injury to anybody. Most of us are anxious to do "good" for ourselves; the trouble is the people who, by carelessness or callousness, do harm to others.

To try to do good to others often establishes a tyranny over them; but to try to avoid doing harm to them establishes a duty over one's self—and that, I think, is the finest moral principle I know.

F. J. CORINA.

## HOMES OF THE PEOPLE

I HAVE not seen any of the houses for the people which have been on view in London and elsewhere, but have read with admiration of the wonders which they contain. Among the many remarkable features of these "Dream Homes," as reported in the Press, are electric light, fitted baths, heated towel rails, refrigerators, built-in cupboards, a buffet type cooker with space for keeping food hot, and a drying cupboard. What is left to imagination but the magic table of Grimm's fairy tale?

In the days of my youth such luxuries as these were unknown, even in the mansions of the idle rich, many of which did not contain a bathroom. The exiguous hip-bath was brought to one's chamber; but there was always plenty of hot water and domestics were many. In some homes portable shower-baths and the conical caps worn by bathers, still lingered.

Most of the adjuncts of the early Victorian bedroom are unknown to the present generation. The four-post bed, its downy expanse enclosed by cosy curtains, the warming-pan, the night light, not the little pyramids of Messrs. Price (to whom I offer a tribute) whose little beacons were so companionable when one was suffering from some childish ailment. The night-light of an earlier time was a candle enclosed in a metal cylinder; those who have laughed at the picture of Mr. Pickwick's nocturnal meeting with the middle-aged lady, will recall that such a one is to be seen there.

There was the little set of three steps by the bedside, that contrived a double debt to pay," the universal night-cap, the pendant watch-pocket and, in winter, the bright fire which was such good company.

When contemplating the environment of the modern housewife, I recall the primitive conditions which were familiar to me in a West country fishing village long ago.

Though lacking the services and conveniences that are now considered essential, we were content and happy. We were healthy, too, save for the maladies incidental to old age, and a wambling of the innards which was common to us youths when the fruit was ripening.

Our village was far from a railway and unmoted on many maps—its local name was "Rags and Tatters." A little brook, crystal clear, flowed by the one street, and from it water was diverted to a granite trough, known as "The Shoot. To this fount, which was the sole water supply, the matrons and maids came clattering in their pattens with the big clomb pitchers which kept the water so sweet and cool. There the gossips would tarry awhile to exchange the seanty news.

The cottages, and a nearby farmhouse, were all built of clomb (clay) with thatched roofs, and, as the walls were very thick, the temperature inside varied but little. These cosy, rustic tenements—they were enveloped with myrtles, fuchsia and tamarisk—had a kitchen and a parlour:—

"With whitewashed wall and nicely sanded floor,  
And varnished clock that clicked behind the door,"

and two, sometimes three, small bedrooms. Within these limitations families of three, or more, healthy children were reared. There was no poverty, and, as nearly everybody kept a pig, bacon was a staple food, milk, vegetables, and, generally, fish were plentiful; but meat was rarely used. If I inquired in the vernacular of my playfellows, "What be gwen tu hev fur dinner then?" the reply was usually, "Fried tetties and a rasher, I reckon."

Every cottage had a capacious linnay, a useful adjunct which held tools, fishing gear, stores of all kinds, and also housed the ubiquitous donkey.

The sanitary arrangements were invariably *al fresco*, often unbarred. They were usually of a sociable character, with

accommodation for two adults and an infant. Of the sheltered valley in which our village was situated it might be said:—

'Tis here

Eternal spring and summer all the year.

Frost and snow were rare and transient visitants. Cacti, myrtles, verbenas, fuchsias and the bay-tree flourished. The latter was a cherished item of our flora for its leaves were an essential ingredient of that relishable dish—marinated pilchards.

Fortunately for us youth there was no church, the nearest being five miles distant, so we were, on Sunday, free to tend our gardens, to fish, bathe and otherwise enjoy our freedom.

The wants of this little community were few. Its short and simple annals were chiefly associated with the recurrence of seed-time and harvest, or the advent of the pilchards in the quiet days of early autumn. All our adventures were, like those of the good Doctor Primrose and his family, "by the fireside, and all our migrations from the blue bed to the brown."

EDGAR SYERS.

## ACID DROPS

"The Unquenchable Light" is the title of a book issued by Professor Letourette of Harvard. The Professor's thesis is that "Christianity has expanded in a series of waves, each of which has been followed by a recession." Well, there has been, so far as Christianity goes, a series of expansions and retrogressions, but the noticeable thing is that each recession has placed the Christian religion still farther back, and the advance has got steadily shorter. No one, not even an intelligent Christian, would say that the Church or Churches are more powerful than they were, say, four or five generations ago, or that their immediate prospects are brighter than they were a century ago. The plain truth is that Christianity is fighting a retreating battle and can no longer make good its losses. To-day it can neither live honestly nor die with dignity.

The Surrey County Council, which recently distinguished itself by decreeing that children under sixteen should not be permitted to enter cinemas on Sunday, has now revised its decree to the extent that children must have parents or guardians with them. We take it that the idea is that parents will not all be willing to go to the cinema on Sunday afternoon. In any case we think the better plan would be to tell the Council to go to blazes and proceed as usual. The only thing to be done with some rules is to break them.

The Bishop of Sheffield says that the new world should be built on a Christian foundation. But Hitler tried carrying out some of the Bible regulations, and got into serious trouble over it. If anyone will consult Deut. XX., 10-15 and Deut. II., 9-19 he will see how closely Hitler and Himmler followed the guide. Hitler always declared that he was carrying out God's decree. Of course, the Bible rules were not so elaborately brutal as the acts of the Hitlerites, but the Israelites did what they could. Hitler elaborated the divine command. That is all.

The Bishop of Birmingham denies that Christianity is dead and done for. We agree with him, Christianity is not dead, but it ought to be. At present it can neither live honestly or die honourably. And its clerical advocates amuse themselves by being paid for one religion and keeping another.

The latest book on the Bible, "Enjoying the New Testament," by Margaret T. Monroe, is specially written to "make Bible study easy." But, being a Catholic, the book has had to be passed by a "Superior," so one may count it as a certainty that nothing approaching the truth of the Bible is likely to appear. For that reason we suggest that those anxious to reach enlightenment should take our "Bible Handbook" for some interesting texts, and then to read two or three books on modern anthropology, in order to understand how the gods were born, how they flourished, and how they die.

There has been of late a great deal of talk about child delinquency, but with very little regard to facts. In the first place, one must make allowances for the disruption of family life as a consequence of the war. The wholesale rush of children away from their homes; the mothers who have been incited to do what they could to help along the war; the atmosphere that follows all war on a large scale. All these factors have to be taken into consideration; and when all are considered, including the disruption of school life, what has occurred is only what might be expected. It is a mark of the step downwards that follows from war, whether the war be inevitable or otherwise.

The villainous aspect of this is the ignoring of other facts. For instance, there is the revelation to the whole world of the state of the poor in certain parts of London. The exhibition was so bad that the men and women who risked their lives to save people said that had it not been for the loss of life we ought to thank the Germans for destroying the horrible conditions under which people lived. Somehow or other the disclosures had to be faced; and it was met in two ways. On the secular side, there were activities of the Government, which dare not, while depending on the people for the conduct of the war, remain silent; hence the promises, as we had in the last war, for a new country "fit for heroes." How far these promises will be fulfilled remains to be seen. So far the situation repeated 1914-18.

The Churches also had to face the situation. Action in that direction took the shape of accounts of children who were quite ignorant of Christianity, had never heard the name of Jesus, had no idea of the meaning of Christmas, although in nearly every school there had been prayers each day, and in most definite religious instruction. These children were never produced, and so far the general Press played into the hands of the clergy by their silence. The Government also switched interest in other directions, after a long series of private consultations with leading clergymen, by producing and carrying an Education Act which gave the clergy greater power in the State schools than they had ever before possessed. The promised secular benefits are yet to come.

But the fact remaining is that during the past four or five generations there have been enormous changes for the better, and the changes have naturally led to more demands, and rightly so. The fact is that the Churches have been losing ground as the secular side of life improved, and the clergy, with the interests behind the Churches, are desperately trying to check movements that promise their destruction.

The "Buenos Aires Herald," which has just reached us, offers to the world a view of Christianity by Protestants against a criticism by Roman Catholics. We are only interested in this conflict of absurdities as far as it is concerned with the Virgin Mary. It runs:—

"We believe in the Virgin Mary, blessed among women, chosen among women, chosen instrument of God . . . a model of wifely perfection, mother love and faith."

Where this information comes from we know not. Beyond the visit from the Angel (in the night), who informed her that her pregnancy was due to a "Holy Ghost"—a story that her betrothed, Joseph, was slow to accept—we know very little about her. The New Testament does relate that she went looking for Jesus while he was yet young, but all mothers would have done that. Apart from this, we should like to know in what way the Mary of the New Testament becomes a model for all women.

Mr. G. H. Keir, disguised somewhat by that vague title "Professor of Psychology," notes that nearly two-thirds of the population attend either church or Sunday school, but adds that the proportion decreases rapidly. He asks why should this be the case? Well, if "Professor" Keir was not writing for a religious newspaper he would probably have found out that children go because they are sent—the parents often send them just to get them out of the way—and at a fairly early stage the majority of children see through the Christian religious yarns. The Government is doing what it can to prevent this development, but in the long run it is likely to prove futile. To use the familiar tag, you can fool all the people part of the time,

but you can't fool all the people all the time. Common sense will have its way, given the opportunity. Even Hitler's religious system broke down in the end.

The Catholic papers, by the way, always note the distinctions won in this war by Catholics. We are not surprised. Take away religion from Catholics and they are much the same as others, a mixture of good and bad—with no superiority in the first class. But what we should like Catholic papers to let us know, approximately, is how many Catholics are in the Armed Forces, and what proportion win distinctions. We might then come to a useful conclusion. Without these figures the published number means exactly nothing.

When the new Bishop of London takes up his post he will be fronted with the sad news that he will receive only £5,000 as a stipend. There will be a further allowance for expenses. We should think so. How can a man be expected to live on a beggarly £5,000? Did not Jesus say "The labourer is worthy of his hire"? And when did a clergyman decline to go higher?

Lady Astor told an audience at Plymouth, "How grateful we should be for the 'Reformation.'" Well, Germany has always been one of the staunchest upholders of the Reformation. But when one is speaking in public one must say something. Lady Astor was unfortunate in her illustration.

Says Stanley K. Bridge, preaching in Sheffield, "It will be a sorry day when leaders of civic life cease to be Christians." We agree. All the parsons in the country will be sorry.

Here is a poser for Freethinkers as stated by one of our divinely enlightened preachers. He wants to know from Atheists what we should think of a lad who ignored his father's advice and then complained, when disaster came, of his father not bringing him up properly? This is a fair sample of the cock-eyed way in which the representatives of God reason. But we will put it another way. Suppose the father had the power to so influence his son that he would always do the right thing instead of the wrong one, but refused to exercise it. And suppose that the boy was brought before a magistrate for some more or less serious breach of civil law. Would not the magistrate give the father a "dressing down" for his neglect? As a matter of fact, we have a civic machinery to correct the faults of such youngsters. So we should very much like to hear what the preacher has to say in the matter. We fancy we are not likely to get any reply.

We have made several suggestions as to the steps that are necessary to prevent future wars. We now add to that list another one that is simple, and though it might not stop wars between different countries, it would at least help to rob war of the "glory" it has at present. The suggestion is that when war commences, the Churches and Chapels in this country should close their doors. That would have two effects. First it would remind God of his responsibility in the matter. At present he is prayed at by both sides, and as he cannot please one without displeasing the other, he naturally remains quite neutral, or if "neutral" is not acceptable, then we must conclude that he helps first one side and then the other, and so gets heartily thanked by the winner, while the loser plans to get him on his side in the future.

So we suggest that when war begins all churches and chapels should close their doors until peace is declared. It is quite evident that God does not bother himself in sticking to one side. Consider that for several years the Germans had things pretty much their own way. All the almost inconceivable brutalities that were practised by the Germans on the Jews, on the Russians, and on their own people were known by God, who knows—so says Jesus—when a bird falls to the ground, yet did nothing to prevent these tortures of men, women and children. If we adopted the plan suggested of closing places of worship, it would be a direct declaration that if we have obligations to "our father," he has obligations to us, his children. A rule that does not work both ways is of little use in human society.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## SUGAR PLUMS

The arrangements for the Annual Conference of the N.S.S. are now complete. The Conference will sit in the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. The morning session at 10.30 and the afternoon session at 2.30 will be for members only. Delegates will be required to produce their credentials at the door; members, the current card of membership. A luncheon for delegates and visitors at 1.30 p.m., price 3s. will be provided at Akama's Restaurant, 35, Gray's Inn Road, opposite the Holborn Hall. The evening demonstration will be in the same building. The chair will be taken by the President, Mr. Chapman Cohen at 6.30 p.m. and he will be supported by the usual array of speakers. Admission will be free.

On Saturday, May 19, the president and secretary will be at the office of the N.S.S. until 7 p.m. to receive visitors.

Mr. Cohen's essay on "Thomas Paine" is now on sale. The price is 1s. 4d. post free. Paine has been very much in the limelight in this country since the U.S.S.R. joined us in the World War. Even the Press has not hesitated to say that in Paine we had the person of a great reformer and a great writer. In spite of all the slander and ill-treatment Paine has received, he has always had a large audience. To-day he is receiving a modicum of the praise he deserves. We should have been better pleased if we could have printed a larger quantity, but the paper shortage determines quantity. So we advise all who wish for copies to write at once.

The "Freethinker" is not a political organ, so we must steer clear of party political championships. But we note that there is a controversy going on between the two principal parties as to who was responsible for the present war. After reading what each had to say, and with a troublesome memory that refuses to work this way to another way to-morrow, we are inclined to think that the present war might never have happened if both the parties—as represented—had gone to sleep, from the close of the last war, the world might by now have been a much happier one.

We are certain also that if when the Russian Revolution cleared out Czarism and all it stood for, including the quality of the Russian Church, and if the attack of the Churches here and elsewhere had not occurred, it is highly probable that the second world war would have never occurred. Russia, Britain and the United States might have lived in increasing amity and the encouragement given to Hitlerism might never have developed as it did. But people have very short memories—and each side knows it.

The recent debate at Bradford between Mr. F. J. Corina and Father Jarrett-Kerr was, as anticipated, a big draw, about 700 people being present despite pleasant weather, and nearly £10 being raised for the Red Cross. Mr. Corina opened the debate with a realistic attack on Christianity in action, especially during the past 50 years, and coupled this with a clear statement of the Secular approach to life. But the trail was not

followed by Father Jarrett-Kerr, who was either too clever to attempt to follow it, or not sufficiently acquainted with the history of his religion to withstand the shock of Mr. Corina's case. At any rate, he left it severely alone, preferring to air "philosophic" abstrusities far remote from the subject, "Secularism or Christianity." In the second and third rounds (there were three speeches on either side) Mr. Corina endeavoured to get Father Kerr to face the facts, but the Christian defender would not rise to the bait, and even the monk's gown and sash worn by Father Kerr could not give dignity to his retreat from reality. The Secularists present were delighted with their case, but the Christians were obviously disappointed with theirs. So, no doubt, was the sprinkling of Anglican clergymen who attended, who, by announcements in the Cathedral and local churches, had persuaded so many of their flock to be present to see the smashing of Secularism that didn't come off. Mr. E. V. Tempest made an excellent chairman.

We were pleased to see that one of our old members and friends, Mr. Stewart Wishart, was the speaker at one of the recent meetings of the Leeds Branch of the N.S.S. We have known him for many years, and at one time he used to lecture frequently, but his occupation (ship's engineer) took much of his later years, but he never missed a chance of doing what he could to plant the seeds of Freethought whenever possible. He was a wide and careful reader, and whatever he had to say we feel certain would be of interest to his listeners. There must be some of his old London friends still alive, and they will be pleased to hear that he is in good health and as keen a Freethinker now as ever.

"Fetishism and Commonsense" provided such a successful evening with the Cardiff Branch N.S.S. that the speaker, Mr. W. A. Andow, Branch Chairman, will continue with the subject on Friday evenings, May 18, June 1 and June 15 at the Severn Road Council School at 7.30. Further details concerning the Branch and its activity may be had from the local secretary, Mr. J. S. Wilde, 24, Splott Road, Cardiff.

It is bad enough for the B.B.C. adopting the policy of not admitting in any way criticism of religion, or even to permit a scientific explanation of the origin of religious beliefs and practices. That is an avowed policy that anybody with sufficient self respect will not be a party to such a shameful practice. But the case becomes flagrant when the director of religious broadcasting, the Rev. Dr. Welch, openly informs a meeting of the Free Church Federal Council that when the forces of secularism are arrayed as never before it is important that the B.B.C. should set out on "an evangelistic campaign with the unequalled means at its disposal."

There is, of course, nothing new in this delivery. During nearly the whole of its existence the B.B.C. has regarded itself as a foremost champion of Christianity. And it has stated both publicly and privately—exhibiting to the world a capacity for downright lying that it would be hard to beat—that it will admit nothing that reflects on the "Christian tradition." And now the chief Christian on the staff—who is receiving a fat salary provided by all users of the wireless—publicly announces that we are likely to have an evangelistic crusade, paid for by all the users of the B.B.C. machinery. One of the best bits of satire we have seen for a long time was the remark, "The English form of Democracy."

But there is one question we would like to put, not for the first time. That question is, "How much longer will men of real ability make themselves co-operators in one of the greatest public frauds we have?" We are not appealing to Christian speakers. That would be useless. Neither are we appealing to those whose reputation has been made by the B.B.C.—mainly because their nonsense suits the B.B.C. nonsense. We are appealing to those men and women who have the ability to stand on their own feet, and who are becoming partners in the policy that is a disgrace to a country which boasts of its freedom.

## U.S.A. AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

OUR readers will remember that some time back the U.S.A. Custom officials seized and refused to admit entrance to the U.S.A. a consignment of Freethought publications sent from this country. The "Truth Seeker" Company properly entered action. This brought a release of the goods, but the "Truth-seeker" Company properly refused to let the matter end thus. A court decision was insisted upon which ended with a victory of the "Truthseeker." A full judgment (taken from the "New York Legal Journal") is given below. It must be borne in mind that when the Custom authorities found themselves faced with a court action they delivered the goods, and the lower court decided that there was no further a case. Very wisely the "Truthseeker" took the case to a higher court, and a verdict was given in its favour.

**"THE TRUTH SEEKER" COMPANY, Inc., PLAINTIFF  
APPELLANT, v. HARRY M. DURNING, AS COLLECTOR  
OF CUSTOMS OF THE PORT OF NEW YORK,  
DEFENDANT-APPELLEE.**

DECIDED JANUARY 18, 1945.

BEFORE CHASE, CLARK AND FRANK, CIRCUIT JUDGES.

Appeal from the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New York.

Action by the 'Truth Seeker' Company, Inc., against Harry M. Durning, as Collector of Customs of the Port of New York, for books and periodicals detained by defendant and for other relief. From a judgment dismissing the action as moot on motion of the defendant, plaintiff appeals. Reversed and remanded.

George Dyson Friou, of New York City, for plaintiff-appellant.

Arthur C. Power, Assistant United States Attorney, of New York City (John F. N. McGohey, United States Attorney, of New York City, on the brief), for defendant-appellee.

CLARK, Circuit Judge.—In an extensive complaint of some thirty-three paragraphs plaintiff alleged that it had placed orders with English book sellers and publishers for twenty copies of 'The Bible Handbook' by Foote and Ball, first published in 1888, twenty copies of 'Papacy in Politics To-day' by McCabe, first published in 1937, and copies of the 'Freethinker,' a periodical published in England for more than fifty years, and that it had been notified by an assistant of the defendant that the books and periodicals had arrived in New York, but were 'being forwarded to the Customs seizure room to be detained for the duration of the war, at which time you may make application for their release.' The publications in question were then asserted to be well known, found in public libraries in the country, and without immorality, obscenity, or other illegal matter; and plaintiff alleged demand for delivery with offer to pay proper charges, and defendant's illegal and capricious refusal violating the three freedoms of the press, of speech, and of religion. In its final three paragraphs plaintiff first asked 'a determination with respect to these three freedoms as enlightened and liberal as now prevails in the British Isles,' then alleged that it was without other adequate legal remedy and would suffer irreparable injury unless it had the relief prayed for, and finally stated that it sought a peremptory or alternative writ of mandamus to the defendant without seeking 'to review any act of the defendant.' The complaint concludes with a prayer for an order to compel the defendant to admit the books and publications into the Port of New York and to deliver them to the plaintiff after assessment and payment of any proper fees, 'and that plaintiff have such other and further relief as to

the court may seem just and proper.' The defendant's time for answer having been extended to September 22, 1943, he returned the publications to the plaintiff on September 16, 1943, and then moved for dismissal of the complaint, which the court granted without costs, October 13, 1943, against the objecting affidavit of the plaintiff.

While the plaintiff appears now to be seeking chiefly the award of costs against the defendant because of the illegality of the detention and in order to prevent recurrences of similar infringements of its rights—thus it asserts that it has already run into further difficulties with later shipments of such books as Thomas Paine's 'The Age of Reason'—yet it appealed from the entire order and now asks for reversal and judgment in its favour. In this it seems well advised, for if defendant was entitled to the judgment he obtained below, plaintiff is hardly entitled to costs, and in any event the discretion exercised by the judgment to refuse them is not to be disturbed (cf. *Shima v. Brown*, App. D.C., 140 F., 2d., 337; *F.R.C.P.*, 54, d). Hence we must decide whether the defendant was entitled to a summary dismissal on a mere showing that he had seemingly repented to his action, and with no explanation of record as to why he took it in the first place. The notice of detention suggests that something involving the prosecution of the war was thought to be involved, and the action presumably was taken under 19 U.S.C.A., Section 1306, prohibiting the importation of books or pamphlets of an immoral or subversive character. But under this statute, which allows no protest to be taken to the United States Customs Court, the collector must transmit information to the district attorney of the district, who must institute proceedings in the district court for the forfeiture and confiscation of the book or matter seized. But although some six months elapsed between the time of detention and the time of release of the books and periodicals, there is no suggestion that any such steps were taken; and it is difficult to perceive what possible relation this material can have to the conduct of the war. For the purposes of this appeal, therefore, we must assume that the detention was illegal.

Now it is quite clear, in view of the ancillary nature only of federal mandamus—except in the District of Columbia—that the plaintiff's suggestion of mandamus as a remedy is unsound (*Youngblood v. United States*, 6 Cir., 141 F., 2d., 912, 914, 915; *Barber v. Hetfield*, 9 Cir., 4 F., 2d., 245; *Rosenbaum v. Bauer*, 120 U.S., 450). But plaintiff has made its allegations full and complete, and has in fact asked, in addition to an order for the return of the material, for 'such other and further relief as to the Court may seem just and proper.' Moreover, without reference to its prayer, it is entitled to the relief to which the stated facts entitled it, even though its own theory of relief may have been unsound. (*F.R.C.P.*, 54, c; *United States for the Use of Susi Cont. Co. v. Zara Cont. Co.*, 2 Cir., Dec. 18, 1944, 141 F., 2d.—, and cases cited). There is no remedy directly against the United States for illegal action of the collector, although the collector himself in appropriate instances may be reimbursed (28 U.S.C.A., sec. 842), the usual remedy appears to be one to hold the collector personally for a default or other improper performance of his duties in an action for damages (*Dioguardi v. Durning*, 2 Cir., 139 F., 2d., 774, 775; *Conklin v. Newton*, 2 Cir., 34 F., 2d., 612, 614; *Union Oil Co. of California v. Pryan*, D.C.S.D. Cal., 52 F. Supp., 256, 261; *De Lima v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S., 1, 177-180).

In such an action it would seem quite clear that the return of the goods was not a complete defense, but would serve only to mitigate damages. That was the well settled rule of the common law now embalmed in *Restatement, Torts, 1934*, section 247, dealing with the conversion of chattels; indeed, as there stated, three conditions must concur even for the mitigation of damages: that the conversion was in good faith, that the physical condition of the goods was unimpaired, and that tender was promptly made and kept good thereafter (*Colby v. Reed*, 99 U.S., 563, 566). And while it seems, as plaintiff apparently visualised in



its allegations of irreparable injury, that it might properly invoke the aid of equity under appropriate conditions (cf. L. Hand, J., in *Sims v. Stuart*, D. C., S.D.N.Y., 291 F., 707; *Newfield v. Ryan*, 5 Cir., 91 F., 2d., 700, 703, certiorari denied *Ryan v. Newfield*, 302 U.S., 729), yet damages would there be awarded, where necessary to complete relief, even though mandatory action was no longer necessary (*Rice & Adams Corp'n. v. Lathrop*, 278 U.S., 509; *Hohorst v. Howard*, C.C., E.D., N.Y., 37 F., 97; cf. *Chafee, Cases on Equitable Relief Against Torts*, 1924, 252n; former Equity Rule 23, 28 U.S.C.A., sec. 723 App.). Of course, defendant could have stopped the running of further costs by an offer of judgment under F.R.C.P., 68.

In view, therefore, of the showing of apparent default by the defendant, it was error for the court to award judgment summarily for the defendant; but since defendant was not required to and did not show whether he had any defense on the merits the action must be remanded to the District Court for further proceedings consistent with this opinion. In this connection it may be noted that we have recognised—as a kind of deduction from 28 U.S.C.A., section 747, making property taken under the revenue laws irrepleviable, but subject to the decrees of the federal court having jurisdiction—a summary proceeding to compel the government officials to proceed promptly to the forfeiture proceedings or return the articles (*In re Behrens*, 2 Cir., 39 F., 2d., 561; *In re No. 32 East Sixty-seventh St.*, 2 Cir., 96 F., 2d., 153; *Goldman v. Am. Dealers Service*, 2 Cir., 135 F., 2d., 398). It has been suggested that such summary procedure, which does not test the merits in any way, should be exclusive where appropriate (*In re No. 32 Sixty-seventh St.*, supra), but with the intimation which seems a necessary corollary that the restriction will not apply where the detention appears to be, or has become clearly illegal (cf. *In re Behrens*, supra, 39 F., 2d., at p. 564; *Goldman v. Am. Dealers Service*, supra, 135 F., 2d., at pp. 400, 401). Whether the summary procedure should ever carry costs against the official, we need not now determine; for when the detention is shown to be illegal by reason of the delay, or unexplained release, or otherwise, there would seem no reason for the denial of costs and at least nominal damages (cf. *De Barry v. Carter*, 5 Cir., 102 F., 130; *Field v. Schell*, C.C.N.Y., Fed. Cas. No. 4771).

Reversed and remanded."

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT WOMAN

Speak no evil of women.—CALDERON.

Nature has given woman so much power that the law has very wisely given her little.—DR. JOHNSON.

Women are more courageous than men.—ANATOLE FRANCE.

WHEN Oliver Goldsmith said that "When lovely woman stoops to folly, and finds too late that men betray" we surmise the poet used the word woman, not in a particular, but in a general sense. George Eliot replied "There's no denying that women are foolish, but God made them to match the men." The men make fools of women, and the women make fools of men—a case of six to one and half-a-dozen to the other. Now this may be so in the interests of love in which battle all is deemed to be fair as regards tactics and strategy, but apart from love, what then?

If it is true that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, the woman-hater would say that the same hand not only wrecks the cradle but the world also, and would cite if nothing else, the two wars of recent years, in support of his argument. The intention of these remarks is not to start a war between the sexes, neither is it to blame woman for anything for which man is not equally culpable, but it would appear from Dr. Johnson's remark that man is afraid of woman. This fear, to mention but

one instance, was shown by the tenacious resistance of man to woman's claim to the vote. But this resistance was ineffectual against that courage eulogised by Anatole France.

Man is a poor animal and often does little or nothing unless there is a woman to goad or inspire him into action. Not for nothing does the Frenchman, when seeking a motive for man's actions, say, "Find the woman!" Whether the action is for good or for evil the influence of woman is, more often than not, discerned. Man has reacted to this influence very strongly throughout the ages, and has "very wisely," from his own point of view, given her little power in law matters. (George Borrow, in one of his books, relates how a woman was brought into the market place of a town in England. She had a halter round her neck, like a beast of burden, and was led by her husband who sold her for a few coppers. A great disservice was done to woman by the Bible-makers (reversing the order of a more "chivalrous" age) when they allowed man to come first and afterwards produced a woman for his enjoyment. The consequence of this was that when Adam fell he was able—because of his longer experience of life—to lay the blame on Eve. "The Woman gave me of the tree, and I did eat," he told his Creator. Note the contemptible reference to his wife as "the woman." Adam and Eve should have been created at the same time, for there is no doubt that Adam became uncouth in living alone. The initial absence of the softening influence of woman has had a disastrous effect on the human race. Another unchivalrous remark was made when Jesus, spurning his mother, said "Woman what have I to do with thee?" and the Psalmist, again laying the blame on woman, remarked "in Sin did my mother conceive me." Religion has placed woman in a false and inferior position from which she is, with difficulty, emancipating herself. Also, it should be remembered, this same religion has been evolved by man.

Woman has inspired the greatest creative works of poets, musicians, sculptors, painters and writers throughout the ages, and we do not doubt, will continue to do so when harmonious conditions prevail throughout the world. At the moment the Muses are silent and abashed. Hasten the time when we can echo Shakespeare's words "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer—And the clouds that lower'd upon our house in the deep bosom of the ocean buried."

An important sphere of woman's influence lies in the home, and the extent of this influence is seen and felt to a degree only to be appreciated, or otherwise, by the man who has chosen a partner for weal or woe. This is the testing time in the lives of many a married couple, the outcome of which must have an important effect on the mind of the child. In a burst of praise to motherhood a writer remarked "A boy's best friend is his mother," but he omitted to tell us whether a girl's best friend is her father. Another tribute to the fond and dutiful mother is admirably expressed by George Eliot "In the love of a brave and faithful man is always a strain of maternal tenderness; he gives out again those beams of protecting fondness which were shed on him as he lay on his mother's knee."

Although not many women possess, like Helen of Troy "the face which launched a thousand ships," which is fortunate for man, beauty when coupled with boldness and intrigue may be the cause of much trouble, and unhappiness. Although woman's place, as vehemently asserted by man, is the home, history shows us that she can, when the occasion demands, occupy the throne, or lead an army with exceptional ability and equal facility. Nowadays, she fills the roles of Doctor, Dentist, Barrister and many other professional and business positions with such accomplishment as to be the envy of her male colleagues. Whether this is because she is more conscientious than man is open to question—but it is a question likely to provoke discussion amongst executives who control both male and female employees.

The age of Mary Wollstonecraft is separated from that of Dr. Marie Stopes by very many years but the former freed her-

self from the mental slavery imposed by man, when she wrote "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" which was published in 1792. In latter years Dr. Marie Stopes in publishing her books about problems of marriage elevated the physical relations of the sexes to poetic heights. These two women merit the highest praise for their work which touched on the mental and physical aspects of the emancipation of women.

These random remarks have been occasioned by thoughts of woman's work in war-time and the glowing tributes which have been paid to her for her services. But in peace-time when praise is not so evident, her work is no less effective, no less important, no less efficient and no less courageous. Whilst she remains in many respects under the yoke of traditional impressions, her influence in the social and political sphere increases. A Parliament comprising at least 50 per. cent. of women is necessary for that progress of which so much is being written and spoken. It is inconceivable that women, as rulers, would do worse than men. In many ways they would do much better.

S. GORDON HOGG.

## ST. JOHN THE DIVINE, MR. BELLAMY, AND FABER & FABER

HERE is a tale of three mysteries.

Mr. H. S. Bellamy is the author of a work\* published by Faber & Faber, in which he claims to have discovered the meaning of "The Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine." That in a time of severe paper shortage such a fantastic and unscientific book of two hundred pages should be presented to the public as a serious work by one of our leading publishing houses, that it should be solemnly and uncritically reviewed in the "Times Literary Supplement," and that a second impression should be called for within the year of publication are strange sidelights on the culture of these days, and the matter is worthy of a brief notice.

Hitherto no one has been able to make sense of the "Book of Revelation," but now comes Mr. Bellamy with the key to the riddle—and what a key! He finds it in the idea of a Viennese engineer, Hans Hoerbiger, who conceived that at one time the earth had a moon which approached so near that it was disrupted and came crashing down to earth. Mr. Bellamy thinks that this happened in the time of civilised man and that the appalling catastrophe was the basis of myths current at the time of St. John who collected them together and edited them. We have no space in which to illustrate the ingenuity with which Mr. Bellamy makes his theory fit—the curious must read the book to show how scientific facts are ignored. It will suffice to consider one glaring fallacy.

It is an essential part of Mr. Bellamy's theory that the moon which fell was encased in ice and that in appearance and composition it was similar to our present satellite which is supposed to have been captured out of space since the grand catastrophe. It is claimed that our moon is encased in ice over one hundred miles thick. Mr. Bellamy says that this is now accepted by a number of eminent scientists. Can he name a single astronomer or geologist of repute in the English speaking world who believes it? One is reminded of the advertisements of quack medicines. Eminent physicians recommend it.

Now there is still a lot we do not know about the moon. We are uncertain as to how and when it was formed and we are greatly puzzled as to the origin of its surface features, but one thing we do know and that is that it is not covered with ice. The Astronomer Royal, Sir H. Spencer Jones, has written: "It

is certain that there is no water on the moon." Although the moon is so bright an object in the night sky measurement shows that only seven per cent. of the sunlight falling upon it is reflected whereas a snow surface would reflect about sixty per cent. Study of moonlight shows that it is what would be reflected by a sphere of dark brown rocks. The other ninety-three per cent of the incident sunlight is absorbed at the surface of the moon and is converted into heat. During the middle of the long day on the moon (which lasts a fortnight) the temperature of the surface rises to 120°C. How then can the surface be ice? Tell that to the marines and the "Times Literary Supplement." Not only is the moon not made of ice, we can add with almost equal confidence that it is not made of green cheese either. Incidentally we may notice that Mr. Bellamy even claims that Mercury, the planet nearest to the Sun, is encased in ice whereas its measured temperature is that of molten lead.

What is the solution of these three mysteries?

Regarding the "Book of Revelation" we recommend for Mr. Bellamy's consideration the view expressed by Mr. Bernard Shaw—that it records the visions of a drug addict. As for Mr. Bellamy and Faber & Faber, we are loth to draw the conclusion that they have purposely conspired to bamboozle the simple clergymen who presumably will form the bulk of the readers of Mr. Bellamy's book. What then? We can only invite Mr. Bellamy and Messrs. Faber & Faber to explain themselves.

DRANOEL SEKWAH.

## PHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHY

I HESITATE in these days of the book-famine (for I do not think that is too strong a word) to recommend a ninepenny Penguin or Pelican book. It is highly probable that the majority of my readers, however strongly they may be attracted towards it, will find it well-nigh impossible to get. Still, I cannot possibly refrain from the opportunity of recommending one which has just appeared. This is the late Professor Susan Stebbing's "Philosophy and the Physicists." It is a study of the work of the late Sir Arthur Eddington, Sir James Jeans, and a few other mystery-making scientists who have been hailed by our clerical friends as pillars of a tottering Church. It covers, in other words, much the same ground as Mr. Chapman Cohen's excellent "God and the Universe," but it covers it in a somewhat different manner.

Mr. Cohen's aim (if I may presume to interpret the editor of this journal to its readers) was to show that the conclusions of Jeans and Eddington were incompatible with all that was best and most accurate in modern science, and the fact that Sir Arthur Eddington himself deigned to reply to Mr. Cohen's criticism is clear proof that the criticism was clearly-worded and forthright. Professor Stebbing, on the other hand, approaches the matter from a more orthodox angle, as befits a London University Professor of Philosophy. She analyses the conclusions of the two mystagogues and shows that, from the point of view of the philosophy which they have professed to admire, their conclusions are unjustifiable. The whole thing is done with consummate ease, the weak spots in the armour of the mystics are picked neatly out, and the reader is left wondering just why and how these two gentlemen and their lesser disciples managed to get such a following.

The answer, of course, is not very difficult to see. It is only in a mental climate befogged and bewildered that queer beliefs can get a hold. The mental climate of our day is as foggy as it well can be. After all, look at the following which has been secured by Christian Science, British Israelism, Spiritualism, and even the extreme absurdities of the Jehovah's Witnesses Movement. It is only in a community saturated with superstition that such things can gain an easy hold. The decay of traditional Christianity has left in the minds of the masses

\* "The Book of Revelation is History," by H. S. Bellamy. Faber & Faber 1942.

vacuum which, pending a general acceptance of Freethought, is readily filled by these peculiar beliefs.

Among the slightly better educated and less superstitious layers of the population other beliefs appear to obtain a grip, and it is here that Jeans, Eddington, and their like come into their own. They appear, to the superficial mind, to have hold of a scientific truth which is not incompatible with the Christian religion, and the clergy, quick to seize upon any excuse which will bolster up their cause and decrease the acceleration of the religious decline, immediately jump at the opportunity. That is the situation as I read it, and it is from that angle that the greatly increased importance, in pious eyes, of Jeans and Eddington should be viewed.

The Freethought attack can be made in many ways, as I have already suggested. The way of Mr. Cohen is in some respects the most effective, but it is well that we should heed such voices as that of Professor Stebbing. She has proved effectively enough that the very philosophy which Jeans and Eddington invoke, can be turned against them, to disprove their facile conclusions. And for that she deserves the thanks of all Freethinkers.

S. H.

### CHILD BRUTALITY

Blame religion for child brutality. Any Father who nails His Only Son to a cross, to bleed to death in torture, and be capable of retaining for Himself the Name of Love, must be a shocking example to His creation, and not blame his offsprings if they act similarly, but in milder forms.

We Atheists know this Loving Father stuff is all bunk, but the multitude in Western civilisation (?) do not know.

Therefore, it is useless to punish individuals; the only cure is to get at the root of the trouble, and clear the human mind from blood lust, brutality, and corpse worship.

Women throw their children into the Ganges, and religion of a similar barmy kind drives their minds along such channels.

Religion . . . Religion . . . Religion all the time. Man can be a brute because he worships a brute; he himself might be quite a decent creature to live with.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### SWINBURNE AND RELIGION.

Sir,—Aunt a Sugar Plum in "The Freethinker" of 20th April in which a Catholic journalist quotes from a letter written by Swinburne, as a boy, wherein he, Swinburne, says how miserable he felt at not being able to pray with the people of Cologne, where he was staying. The quotation, as the editor points out, is given to show how our great poets always pined for the Faith. The other side of the story, the poet's more mature valuation of religion, is typified in the following lines, which were culled from the "Daily Herald":—

Light, light and light! To melt and break in sunder  
All clouds and chains that in one bondage bind  
Eyes, hands and spirits forged by fear and wonder,  
And sleek, fierce fraud, with hidden knife behind;  
There goes no fire from Heaven before their thunder,  
Nor are the links not malleable that bind  
The snared limbs and souls that are thereunder;  
The hands were mighty were the eyes not blind.  
Priest is the staff of king;  
And chains and clouds one thing  
With fettered flesh and devastated mind.  
Open thine eyes to see,  
Slave, and thy feet are free;  
Thy bonds and thy beliefs are one in kind.

C. F. BUDGE.

#### WILLIAM II. AND HITLER.

Sir,—I was pleased to see the reference in your "Acid Drops" to the religious nature of William II. This Emperor always personally conducted Divine Service on his battlements and never failed above all in the hour of great danger, to refer to his intimate relationship with the Lord of Hosts.

Here is a specimen of the encouraging speech he once gave to his troops:—

"The great battles of 1917 have shown that there is One above who is an absolutely unshakable ally of the German people: I mean the Lord of Hosts. In Him the German people can put its absolute trust. . . . Only yesterday I was talking to the comrades round Verdun. They have sniffed the early morning air of victory. . . . It is our firm confidence that the Lord of Hosts is with us to the end. If the enemy rejects peace, then it is our task to bring back peace to the world, and there is only one way to do it: we must smash our way in, with our mailed fist and our shining sword, through the gates of those who are enemies to Peace."

Needless to say that Hitler is of the same type, only more so. He and his people are the representatives of the Moral Order of the Universe. And this Moral Order has to be enforced by all means. The holy and sanctifies even the dirtiest of means: vide Buchenwalde. Both William and Hitler were good speakers. But, as Prosper Mérimée said of similar French types: "Pour le malheur de leurs peuples, ils savaient très-bien parler."

Another great adept in popular eloquence and in religious enthusiasm, was a man of a very different age—to wit, the Saviour Himself. He, too according to the New Testament, could move great crowds: "For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matth. VII. 29).

He, too, did so to the ruin of Himself and His people. For the Romans never tolerated another Jewish rebel after Him, and finally conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Holy Temple of Solomon A.D. 70.

Moral: Beware of good Christians and good speakers!

OSCAR LEVY.

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

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

#### LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBBY; Parliament Hill Fields, 3 p.m., Mr. L. EBBY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., various speakers.

#### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: "The Origin of International Law."

#### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway, Bradford).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., a lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. W. BARKER will lecture.

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

Oswaldtwistle.—Wednesday, May 16, 7.30 p.m., M. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Read (Lanes.).—Monday, May 14, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Worsthorne.—Friday, May 11, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

#### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Building, College Square).—Sunday, May 20, 7.30 p.m., lecture and debate.

Cardiff Branch N.S.S. (Severn Road Council School).—Friday, May 18, 7.30 p.m., Mr. W. A. ANDOW: "Fetishism and Commonsense."

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Chairman:

**Mr. CHAPMAN COHEN**

(President of the National Secular Society,  
Editor of "The Freethinker")

Speakers:

J. T. BRIGHTON.	F. J. CORINA.
L. EBURY.	R. H. ROSETTI.
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