

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXV.—No. 23

Sunday, June 10, 1945

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Concluded from Page 198.)

### Persecution in Full Blast

THE question of how far the Roman Catholic Church endorses the policy of persecution is only a minor aspect of a much larger subject. That is: Why should intolerance, with its consequent persecution, be so generally and so universally associated with religion? Intolerance, the determination to suppress anyone who offends the gods, is the least questioned manifestation of religious feeling. So far as Christianity is concerned, until very recent times the right to persecute was hardly questioned. Roman Catholics might resent persecution by Protestants, Protestants would question the right of Catholics to persecute them, but very few denied that the first duty of a good Christian was to suppress unbelievers. On the one side the Roman Church elaborated the most minute rules for the detection and punishment of heresy, and elaborated the most brutal methods of torture known until Nazism came on the scene. On the other hand, Protestants were agreed that it was the duty of the civil power to root out heresy, even at the cost of the death of the unbeliever. It is one of the outstanding features of historic Christianity that whenever rival Christians agreed it was mostly upon something of which both should have been ashamed. Idiomatic religious beliefs and damnable intolerance have been the outstanding features of Christians in power. The plea of the Roman Catholic has always been that where the spiritual and temporal interests are identical heresy is of the nature of a civil crime as well as a religious one.

### The Logic of Persecution

But there is a deeper root for religious intolerance than is supplied by the Christian Church. It is deep down in human history, but it is not older than the beginnings of religion. In all primitive societies the gods—spirits—play a great part. Offending the gods may involve a shortage of food, the presence of disease, defeat in conflict, and so forth. We have that phase with us even to-day, when Christian leaders do not hesitate to say that calamities are due to our neglect of God. Plagues and bad crops have been common instruments in the hands of the Gods to punish disbelief. We have had that plea in connection with the present world war. And it is worth noting that all the days of prayer we have had for the conquest of Germany, and the solemn visit to church of King and Queen, with prominent politicians, are all illustrations of the primitive custom that carries back to sheer savagery.

From this point of view—one accepted by all our leading anthropologists—the forcible weeding out of heresy is a social necessity. Probably the most brazen instance of the

return to savagery that we have to-day is furnished by the B.B.C.'s religious addresses.

From this primitive mental condition the old Roman and Greek civilisations were rapidly freeing themselves. Certainly both were free from that rabid thirst for persecuting heretics that existed under Christianity. Unmistakably the growth of Christianity involved persecution on a wide scale. The possibilities of gods being mere figments of the imagination were freely discussed in both Greece and Rome. Anyone who follows the story of the downfall of ancient culture will see the decline as Christian belief developed. Religious persecution became a duty. If one cannot be saved in the next world, or cannot carry out his duties in this one, the elimination of unbelief is a duty that has first claims. The removal of the non-believer is as important as we regard the sweeping of the streets or the securing of pure water for drinking purposes.

The only escape from this conclusion is to hold that conduct is superior to belief. And no Christian Church dare admit that. It would be an assent to the conclusion that religious belief is of small consequence. A few centuries since no Christian would have disputed this. Historically it is not true that Protestantism was based on the belief in freedom. Each Christian group has asked for "freedom" for itself, and nearly every group has denied it to others. The liberty that has been practised under Protestantism went only so far as the situation made it inevitable. (It is only a few weeks ago that a police court magistrate refused a man his legal rights on the sole ground that the man in question did not believe in a God.) Moreover, with Protestantism split into a number of rival sects, some allowances have to be made for difference of opinion. All over the civilised world the growth of opinion, the tolerance of religious differences, are expressions of the presence of disbelief.

### Christianity and Torture

The influence of the Christian Church was direct and deep. Certainly it is due to Christianity that torture assumed the place it had in mediæval life. And it is certain that the use of torture increased rapidly in the legislation of Christian Europe. The case against the Church is well put by that unquestioned authority on the subject, H. C. Lea. In describing the spiritual dragooning of Europe by the Church, he says:—

"It came at a time when the old order of things was giving way to the new—when the ancient customs of the barbarians, the ordeal, the wager of law, the wergild, were growing obsolete in the increasing intelligence of the age, when a new system was springing into life under the revived study of Roman law . . . The whole judicial system of the European monarchies was undergoing reconstruction, and the happiness of

future generations depended on the character of the new institutions. That in this reorganisation, the worst features of the imperial jurisprudence—the use of torture and the inquisitorial process—should be eagerly, nay, almost exclusively adopted, should be divested of the safeguards which in Rome restricted their abuse, should be exaggerated in all their evil tendencies and should, for five centuries, become the prominent characteristic of the criminal jurisprudence of Europe, may safely be ascribed to the fact that they received the sanction of the Church. . . . Of all the curses which the Inquisition brought in its train this, perhaps, was the greatest—that until the closing years of the eighteenth century, throughout the greater part of Europe, the inquisitorial process, as developed for the destruction of heresy, became the customary method of dealing with all who were under accusation; that the accused was treated as one having no rights, whose guilt was assumed in advance, and from whom confession was to be extorted by guile or force.”—“History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages” (Vol. I., pp. 559-60).

The poisoning of the public mind by the brutal intolerance of the Churches finds a complete analogue in the brutalising of the German people by the policy of Hitlerism. Consciously or unconsciously, Hitler and his gang trod in the footsteps of the mediæval Church. The parallel is complete. The Church legalised brutality to unbelievers, as did Nazism in modern Germany. In both cases intolerance and its mate, brutality, carried no disgrace. Men learned to boast of it. With the Church, as with Nazism, cruelty was the mark of loyalty to the ruler. Friendly and family ties counted for nothing. Wives were encouraged to denounce their husbands, children to betray their parents. The Church had compassion for the thief or the murderer; it had none for the heretic. Honest disbelief was the one unforgivable crime. The New Testament story of the thief on the cross was offered by Jesus in anticipation of what was to happen. Its social reaction is obvious. With all the care displayed by a breeder of animals in killing off the undesirable types in order to breed from a desirable one, the Church generation did what it could to cherish the least worthy characters. It bred from the undesirable.

A well-known authority on early Christianity, Principal Donaldson, has placed the hardness and brutality of the Middle Ages to the Church holding up celibacy as the most desirable form of conduct. It encouraged the brutal and discouraged the more sensitive characters. Take this steady brutalising, the weeding out of the better types, and you have a social environment that marches side by side with German Nazism. Our leaders to-day are stressing the difficulty of handling, not the older generation, but specifically the younger one. Germany has had but a dozen years to poison the mind of its younger people, and our scientific leaders are marking the correction of this as one of the hardest tasks the Allies have before them. But in place of a dozen or fifteen years, put as many centuries, and in place of punishments that must end in this world, place another world where the tortures go on for ever and ever, and these of an almost inconceivable brutality, and one begins to form some appreciation of the part that has been played by what the B.B.C. calls the “Christian

tradition.” And by way of indication of the way out, let us also remember that it was the revival of the learning of the old pagan culture that gave the Christian world a chance to create a certain degree of purification.

But its effects are still with us. There are business men who will tell you candidly—and without any sufficient feeling of degradation—that it does not pay to attack Christianity. We have a coming election, and scores of the candidates would tell you—in confidence—that an honest confession of being without religion would rob them of half the votes. They would cheerfully be given to a humbug and a liar. Mark also that the mental dishonesty of so many of our candidates brings them little reproof. Their political superiors would probably call them “dained fools” for letting people know what their religious opinions were.

Man is peculiarly dependent upon his environment—more so than any other living thing. This is not his weakness, it is his strength; for the other animals repeat the customs of their parents with no other possibility of development than by the slow process of natural selection. But the human animal is born with but one great capacity, that of partaking of the rich stock of ideas and inventions that his forefathers have built up. It is this pliability upon which Hitlerism and the Christian Churches built. They both stand in the way of a given generation adding to that stock of human treasures that await the newcomer. The pliability of man—despite the scientific foolishness—or ought we to say ignorance?—of a Vansittart—the initial weakness is the secret of man’s after greatness. What the Churches did was to take advantage of this pliability and use it to an evil end. It remains for those who look at human history with wise eyes to see that each generation puts our vast heritage to a profitable use.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## DR. COULTON'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

IT has been wittily remarked that history does not repeat itself: the historians repeat one another. Indubitably writers of well merited celebrity have devoted scanty attention to the original documents which should form the foundation of their historical writings. But this shortcoming cannot be urged against Dr. G. G. Coulton whose candid autobiography “My Fourscore Years” (Cambridge University Press, 1943, 21s.) reveals the life and labours of an earnest inquirer who studied all available MSS. and other authoritative documents relating to the special period he surveyed in his “Five Centuries of Religion” and other scholarly volumes.

With legal and clerical blood in his ancestry, Coulton was born in 1858. Educated at St. Omer, Felsted, and other seminaries, he became more and more identified with Cambridge. He gives a very interesting account of his experiences at Heidelberg and his travels in Italy, during which he was constantly amassing information. In Germany he was seriously impressed by the popularity of the prospect of an impending war, especially in military circles, some years before the conflict of 1914-18 began. Consequently, he was fully alive to the danger of German aggression.

Coulton devotes an illuminating chapter to the controversial aspects of history. As he modestly admits: “I first entered the historical field frankly as an amateur, and academic officials had

every right to receive me critically. Nor can I ignore the generosity with which, on the whole, I have been treated by reviewers. But I feel now from inside, even more strongly than when I wandered outside the precincts, that history suffers more than any other faculty from academic conservatism and pedantry."

Benedetto Croce's contention that History is Experience, Dr. Coulton endorses, and he truly contends that a record of our most matter-of-fact experiences is as much history as an account of the Norman Conquest. Verily, past, like present, events lie open to misunderstanding, and diverse verdicts may be given concerning them. Still, generally considered, there is far more agreement than difference of opinion among those who earnestly seek for truth. And in order to arrive at truth a real desire to secure it is essential.

To expose error and establish historical truth, Coulton claims that commonsense is our surest guide. Not that commonsense which is tantamount to common ignorance, but that sound sense which impels us to face realities in the stern everyday battle of life. Coulton maintains that: "Commonsense prompts the real truthseeker to use all his powers of observation and imagination. It spells final success, up to the point of which the man's faculties were capable of success, both for the financier and the cobbler. Without having read Bishop Butler, each knows that Probability is the Guide of Life, and that each throws all his energies into the search for probabilities. That is the successful business method, and it should also be the foundation of Historical Method. All discussions and theories are mischievous which, by representing Historical Method as something esoteric, tend to obscure this truth. That which we label as peculiar to the specialist is in danger of becoming peculiar to a clique. The more we divorce history from the common life of ordinary men, the more we strangle its own vigorous life."

Coulton has been accused of treating distinct periods of history as if they responded to a single test. While admitting his accuracy of statement and the reliability of his references, his critics complain that in matters controversial he delivers severe judgments. But Coulton rejoins that he has given chapter and verse for all his findings, while there is no confusion of dates where successive events are surveyed. Moreover, Coulton's critics when challenged have failed to substantiate their charges by citing specific instances from his writings of the failings they deplore.

Our historian pertinently inquires why do his critics condemn him for doing imperfectly what they and their associates have never attempted at all. The very men who censured Coulton's international survey of monasticism later applauded the "Cambridge Economic History" for "its commonsense plan of embracing all Europe, and thus utilising one country's experiences to throw light upon another's." Indeed, the extensive documentary records relating to the monasteries and the causes of their Dissolution have been sadly neglected by professional historians and Coulton seems to have been virtually the first chronicler who made a special study of the subject at first hand.

It will be a calamity to historical scholarship if the concluding volume of Coulton's "Five Centuries of Religion" remains in manuscript. He tells us: "I there rehearse, chronologically and geographically, the different reforms attempted during the two centuries preceding the Dissolution. I try to do justice to those orthodox reformers, who were often veritable heroes, while noting the transitory nature of most of their reforms. In a supplementary chapter, I show how these same difficulties persisted in those countries where the monastic system survived the Reformation. I have, in my turn, examined my critics in sufficient detail to feel sure that, if they have never met my challenge, it is because they have not found sufficient evidence."

One objection to Coulton is that he is too fond of passing judgment. Ranke, he remarks, has been held up to unstinted admiration for his dispassionate studies. Yet, as Coulton notes,

even Ranke judges Henry VIII. and in the very text in which he deprecates historical judgments he condemns Macaulay for judging and also censures other eminent historical writers. As Coulton points out: "Professor Collingwood has noted this practical infraction of the writer's own law: those who warn us off from judging Julius Cæsar are most unsparing in their condemnation of Mommsen's conception of Cæsar." Ironically enough, the "impartial" Ranke has now been acclaimed for his intellectual kinship with Bismarck and Hitler! On the other hand, Lord Acton counselled his students "to suffer no man and no cause to escape the undying penalty which history has the power to inflict on wrong."

The charge of being too controversial, which was urged against men of the stature of Huxley and Tyndall, almost invariably emanates from men who have a discredited case to defend, while those who desire the truth warmly welcome free and open discussion. As Coulton reminds us: "Lessing spent more than half of his life energies in controversy; and Socrates was perhaps the arch-controversialist of all time and that even the Gospels and the Acts are full of controversy, sometimes in very plain language." It is not the use, but the abuse of judgment and controversy that needs admonition.

That greatly overrated Catholic apologist, the late Cardinal Gasquet, has long been pilloried by Coulton for his brazen mis-statements. Coulton disclaims all personal animosity towards Gasquet; he grew relentless when he found that this priestly author obstinately sinned against the light.

In the first instance, Coulton courteously inquired whether Gasquet could furnish him with references to the Registers that lent support to his claim that the morals of the monasteries were above suspicion. Gasquet evaded the request and ultimately preserved a stony silence despite the fact that many mis-statements and garbled citations had been detected in his "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries."

To account for Gasquet's sullen silence, that notorious Jesuit, Father Thurston, defending his colleague publicly declared, notes Coulton, "that I had begun with incivilities which naturally moved the great man to silence." So Coulton promptly published the whole of the correspondence which reduced Thurston in his turn to silence, although the Jesuit never had the grace to apologise.

Gasquet's "Old English Bible" was also shown to contain glaring inaccuracies, but these errors, as well as those of "Henry VIII.," were never corrected. Certainly, Gasquet's reputation suffered, even with honest Catholics, although his historical excursions had gained him his Cardinal's hat.

Both "The Times Literary Supplement" and the "Church Times," once his ardent admirers, later urged that for his own credit Gasquet should meet Coulton's accusations. Professor Gairdner, a one time fervent supporter, admitted to Coulton in writing that his strictures on Gasquet's shortcomings constituted "a powerful indictment." And eventually Gairdner recanted his earlier view of Gasquet's trustworthiness and in 1906 permitted Coulton to publish a letter in which that eminent historian expressed a partial recantation. Moreover, states Coulton: "In 1912, when I sent him a fresh exposure of garbled texts in Gasquet's recently published 'Abbot Wallingford,' he replied: 'Abbot Gasquet does surprise me and I do not wonder at your severity.' One of the last things he ever published ('Nineteenth Century,' July, 1909) amount to a general retraction of his earlier favourable judgment." As of old, the representatives of the great lying Church place the interests of ecclesiasticism above merely moral considerations. False dealing and equivocation are still exalted as shining virtues, especially in priestly dealings with heretics and unbelievers.

## ACID DROPS

A good, skilful, artistic liar is one of nature's treasures. But they are very, very rare; if there were a few more we would suggest one being made permanent Archbishop of All-England and another made a life-long Prime Minister in the House of Commons. But we must not place the Roman Catholic "Universe" in that glorious company. For example, in a recent issue of that paper we find: "The Catholic Church was almost alone in offering sustained and organised opposition to the Nazi system." That will do; we cannot give the "Universe" good marks for such a concoction. The Pope did a very profitable deal with Mussolini. And we do not recall him objecting to the brutalities in Greece and Mesopotamia, nor against Italian and German aeroplanes at work in Spain. No, the "Universe" cannot be awarded for giving us such a lean and easily detected falsity. A better excuse, although not a completely truthful one, comes from the German Archbishop Groeber. He says that Catholics were powerless. But what were the Saints and the Virgin doing? They can afford to show themselves in plain daylight merely to get praise. If they had appeared in Berlin in full celestial war-paint they would have paralysed half the German army. Still, the tales are very clumsy. With all the experience in lying the Church has had it should have done better.

But in some things the Church does score. For example: It seems that a Portuguese lady was ill. Doctors could not cure her. Then she went to a priest who prayed over her, with a relic of St. Philomene. The lady then left the church, cured. The lady was suffering from softening bones. It is not said what the precise disease was, or where the bones were situated; off-hand, we would diagnose it as cranial decay.

It looks as though there will be trouble in Caithness. The County Council has accepted a recommendation from the Educational Committee that in this Protestant County of Caithness no person shall be eligible for the post of teacher, director of education or librarian under the County Council who does not profess the Protestant faith. The resolution, to become valid, must be passed by the Secretary for Scotland. But what lovely things are these lovers of the Lord. If there is anything rotten in their religious minds, their faith in God will adorn it with roses and intolerance. Of course, we are against any sort of religion taught in the State schools, but that is because there is a good social point behind it. Behind Christian bigotry there is nothing but ignorance and brutality.

This is the way in which a Catholic priest explains things' in the "Catholic Times" for May 25. First, concerning error. "All religious denominations, other than the Catholic Church, and no matter how innocent they are, have no right to freedom." But Saint Thomas lays down the principle that "... God allows some evils to occur in the world—which he could prevent—lest, if they were removed worse might follow," and he goes on to say that if religious liberty is granted in Spain, "it cannot be claimed as a civic right, much less a moral right." There we have Roman Catholicism in its most liberal aspect. Well, we know what would be the result if Roman Catholics dominated this or any other country.

We note that the Roman Catholic Press was foaming over the Russians taking charge of a "so-called deputation" of Poles and imprisoning them. The original story was that Stalin had invited them to come, and they were seized as soon as they arrived. Then Stalin denied categorically that they were ever invited, and also that they were plotting and planning when they did arrive. That story was killed. But we note that the Catholic papers have not had the decency publicly to withdraw what they said. We are of opinion they knew what the truth was all the time. What the Vatican wants is the old Poland which was essentially a Fascist State, with the Roman Church in a powerful position.

Looking down the list of officials of the new Cabinet one is struck by the all-round geniuses we have in the political world. A few years' experience as Minister of Education qualifies one for becoming Minister of Labour. Or a few years as Minister of Education gives a man sufficient knowledge for him to take up the Ministry of Fuel. And so on and so forth. The genius that can turn from one subject to another at five minutes' notice simply staggers the poor common man. Or is it that these geniuses are merely puppets at the mercy of the permanent staff? Somehow we have a sneaking conviction that our publicised leaders are not leaders at all. Other forces are at work.

If our godites represent God properly there is nothing he desires so much as being advertised. If people say nothing about him, and cease to pray to him or exalt him, he gets angry and does nothing to help his children, or he stages a calamity to remind his children that he is still there. So we suggest that he takes steps to impress on all humans that "God is not mocked," and above all he is not to be mocked with impunity. In front of us there lies an elaborate account of the sufferings of the Dutch people from shortness of food. The Allies are doing what they can, and at its best the sufferings of the Dutch people must be very great. God sees this as he sees everything—and does nothing.

Now from a document that lies before us we see a serious factor in that those who are trying to feed the Dutch people have to fight the existence of "black market racketeering." That is not crushed in Holland, any more than it is in England and other places. But surely God could lend a hand. We suggest that every time one of these "racketeers" makes a deal God should deprive him of sight until he mends his ways. That would be a striking example of God's existence and power. If it was then extended to London, the increase of worshippers would be colossal. In fact, it would ruin "The Freethinker." God would have proved his existence.

Assuming that religious people think about their religion—a rather doubtful assumption—they must be seriously puzzled by the destruction of churches of all kinds during the war. From some items of news we gather in Germany the agitation is serious, for out of 12,000 churches and chapels 9,000 are reported as either seriously damaged or destroyed outright. We cannot say that in this matter God missed the bus, for there is no evidence that he even tried to catch it. All that can be said on his behalf is that he didn't seem to care who or what was injured so long as there was a good "show." And judging from the fact that there has been thanks given to God for the churches not damaged, God may console himself that his followers are as stupid as ever—where religion is concerned.

The Catholic Archbishop of Freiburg has written a pastoral condemning the Nazis for all that has happened to Germany, and—following the "nothing like leather" plan—insists they must get back to God and Christian principles. But the Germans have, in overwhelming numbers, been following Christian teachings and Christian principles. If these have not kept people straight in the past, why should we believe they will do any better in the future? The certain thing is that Christianity did not keep the Germans—or anyone else—right in the past, and there is no reason for believing that any better will be done in the future. In a world where humbug is widely and generously scattered, Christianity still holds the premier place.

Even among Roman Catholics the doubt of the value of Christianity is beginning to find expression. We find in the "Universe" there is great uneasiness. Thus one writes asking "Why are so many seemingly devout Catholics uncharitable and selfish." The reply given is: "They fail to correspond to the grace of God." That is hardly saying anything worth bothering about. Perhaps the "Universe" will explain why in prison returns the percentage of Catholics is very high? We don't say that alone disproves Catholic dogmas, but it does lower their ethical and social value. We will let it go at that.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,  
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. SMITH.—Your suggestion is a good one, and we may try it. We have had it in mind for some time.

For "The Freethinker."—J. Shepp, 10s.

C. H. EVANS.—Thanks for cutting, but really a person of the type of Captain Ramsey is hardly worth wasting paper and time. He is useful only as a type.

J. STEAD.—Your Minister who declared that "an atheistic poet was a contradiction in terms" is either a fool or a liar. As you know the man and we do not, we must leave it to you to decide to which class he belongs. Thanks for verses.

J. A. FREEMAN.—Thanks. But overloaded at the moment.

*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.*

*THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.*

*Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.*

## SUGAR PLUMS

Scene, the House of Commons. Date, May 8, 1945. (Please note that this date is a long time after Copernicus and Newton, and eighty years after Darwin.) Speaker, Mr. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England. The essential, reasoned part of his speech is just finished, and the situation offers an opportunity for an exhibition of that impishness which seems to be a part of his make-up, and such stress as that to which he has been subjected might well have led to the exhibition that followed.

The Prime Minister speaks.

"I recollect well that at the end of the last war the House did not feel inclined for debate or business, but desired to offer thanks to Almighty God, to the great Power which seems to shape and design the fortunes of nature and the destiny of men. I therefore beg to move that the House do now attend at St. Margaret's to give humble thanks to Almighty God for our deliverance from the threat of German domination."

And so the members of the Government and ordinary members (there was an election pending) went to thank God for having, after five years' delay, beaten the German terror. But only just in time; for it is now said that if the Germans had brought their new weapons to perfection, the people of this island might have been completely decimated; at any rate, the war would have been transferred to Canada, and we should have had the denizens of this island turned into slaves. Our God, the one who listens in St. Margaret's Church, does things, but he is sometimes very leisurely in his movements. There are millions of men and women on the Continent who have suffered under Nazi rule who would have been saved if God had taken a hand, say, when Hitler took control. To be quite fair, Hitler said he was following a god, but, as events proved, he backed the wrong horse. Or did God back both sides?

Once again the Convocation of Canterbury raises the question of better training for those who enter "Holy Orders." And once again the lament arises over the "unsatisfactory intellectual calibre of candidates," and also the need for specialists in the Church. What else could reasonable people expect? The deterioration of the quality of the clergy has been steadily going on for nearly a century. To-day it has become so marked that even the heads of the Church can no longer deny it. The intellectual dishonesty of Christian leaders has almost reached the limit.

What is meant by saying there is "need for specialists in the Church." It certainly does not mean honest dealing where genuine Christianity is concerned. "Specialists" in this connection means that real Christianity must be kept in the background, and there must be put forward a social teaching that has nothing to do with historic Christianity in any shape or form. The Church has to choose between filling the pulpit with a poor type of men who will preach historic Christianity, or substitute for religion a milk-and-water socialism which is of little value to decent and intelligent people.

There must be a strange absence of humour in the "Daily Telegraph," or there must be at least one Atheist on the staff. But in a recent issue there was in the editorial page a blood-curdling article describing the terrible sufferings of the Dutch people for five years under Nazi rule. And at the side of it there was a three-quarter-length article by the Rev. Mr. Ashby asking for a special day of thanksgiving to God for what we have escaped. We do not know whether Mr. Ashby went down on his knees to thank God that he was saved, but if that is the case he ought to have had a hearty kick for his selfishness and his stupidity.

For five years this most brutal of all wars, accompanied by the most horrible tortures that the world has ever known, passed, and God did nothing. We poor humans did what we could. We fought and died, some came back home crippled for life; others, who showed no physical marks of the war, will find their nights restless when they dream of what they have done and what they have seen. Still God did nothing. But when we poor mortals had secured armies large enough, and munitions great enough, and leaders skilful enough to defeat the Germans, then Mr. Ashby says God stepped in and we must now have a great national festival in honour of the God who did nothing until we were in a position to save ourselves. Really one wonders what is behind this talk of thanking God. Is it roguery or stupidity, or is it a little of each?

Not quite so often during this war did we have so many days of prayer for victory as we had in the first world conflict. But we did have a number, fathered by the clergy and the dancing dolls of the B.B.C. They kept the gods well in front of us. But we do suggest that the next war we have the clergy should adopt as its petition to God the "War Prayer of Mark Twain":—

"O Lord our God, help us to fight the foe. Help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of the patriotic dead; help us to lay waste the humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their widows with unavailing grief. For our sakes, who adore thee, Lord, blast their hopes, make heavy their steps, and water their way with tears."

Not pretty, but with plenty of human and humane truth.

Towards the end of the last war there were large numbers of reports—from clergymen—of men who had returned to the religion in which they had been reared. We were willing to believe that those who had been driven to insanity may have acted in that way, but certainly not those who had come out of the scumpage with a sound mind. Still, the clergy have stressed the duty of our offering sacrifices to the Lord, and many, particularly the clergy, offered to God a sacrifice—of truth. At any rate, that particular lie has not been very prominent—except where the B.B.C. rules—and in the interests of Jesus the B.B.C. laughs at limits. The disbelief in Christianity is getting too common for the clergy to deny that among the men in this war the belief in Christianity has definitely weakened.

## SIXTY YEARS IN THE N.S.S.

(Concluded from page 199)

ONE of my greatest disappointments in the N.S.S. was the failure of G.W. Foote and J. M. Robertson to work together. I had the greatest admiration for both of them. I often thought that if Robertson had Foote's style and Foote possessed Robertson's industry they might have been numbered among the immortals. I happened to be present when the final rupture took place, and the incident which caused it was of such a trivial nature that it showed how deep the incompatibility between them must have been. It was about a woman. Not the ordinary triangle affair, because I don't think either of them had ever seen the lady in question. It was at the time when the N.S.S. had taken over the Hall of Science, which had previously been run by the proprietor, Mr. R. O. Smith, and the committee were considering the question of booking speakers. One Committeeman put forward the name of this lady whom I had never heard of before or since. As Mr. Foote seemed to demur the motion was withdrawn. Whereupon Robertson wrote it out and passed it to Mr. Foote, who as President was in the Chair. Mr. Foote placed it beside him on the table, refusing to put it to the meeting. The next day, Robertson sent in his resignation as representative of the Glasgow Branch. He continued to lecture for N.S.S. branches, but whether he continued his membership I do not know.

Notwithstanding his encyclopædic knowledge and his handsome presence, J. M. R. was never a box office success at N.S.S. meetings. His lectures seemed caviare to the general. But if he met with any criticism or opposition, the scene changed as if by magic. He was the very Polyphemus of debate; tearing his opponent limb from limb, and eating him afterwards.

I once raised the question of his partial failure with Mr. Foote. "Well, Davies," he said, "if you give a dog a bone it will lick all the meat off it in a couple of minutes, and then worry the bone for the rest of the day. That's what Robertson does. He exhausts the subject in the first quarter of an hour, and nibbles the dry bones of it for the remaining three quarters." "But," I replied, "he's splendid in discussion." "Yes," Foote replied, "the trouble with Robertson is that he can enthuse only over his antipathies. And after all, we can't keep a man to go about sticking pins in him."

In 1905 we were crossing the Channel en route for the International Freethought Congress to be held in Paris. Robertson was on the same boat, but not a member of our party. Evidently the Liberal Party had discovered that he knew more about tariffs and trade than any of them and would be a useful man to oppose the Tariff Reformers, and he was now a prospective candidate for Parliament. Being more interested in him as a literary critic and Freethought propagandist than as a politician, I told him I sincerely hoped he would be defeated at the forthcoming General Election. He laughed and said many people would be more concerned with that than he would, but he thought membership of Parliament would give his books some additional advertisement; and he instanced the case of Mr. John Morley, whose books were selling as remainders before he entered the House, but a complete edition was published and sold shortly afterwards. Some time later I mentioned this to Mr. Foote. His only comment was: "Ah, but John Morley wrote different books from those of J. M. Robertson."

I remember an amusing passage between these two redoubtable champions at a meeting called to protest against the prosecution of Mr. George Bedborough, who had been committed for trial for selling amongst other things Dr. Havelock Ellis's work on "Sexual Inversion." Mr. Foote was one of the speakers whilst Robertson was in the Chair. Mr. Foote on this occasion was in his more oracular mood. He saw little chance of the prisoner being acquitted. He was being tried by a common jury. He

would infinitely prefer his being tried by a judge only. The judge might be prejudiced, but in giving judgment he would have his reputation to consider. But a common jury—greengrocers, cheesemongers—brought from nowhere, and returning to it after finding the prisoner guilty, with no further responsibility! His only hope was that one of the jury might be sensible and courageous enough to differ from the other eleven and the prosecution might be abandoned.

Mr. Robertson, before calling upon the next speaker, said if there were any greengrocers and cheesemongers present he would ask them not to take the words of Mr. Foote too literally as a reflection on their general intelligence. Personally he did not see why a greengrocer or cheesemonger should be less intelligent than the average citizen. Mr. Foote had based his hope upon a jurymen standing out for acquittal against the rest. Well, he might be a greengrocer or a cheesemonger. If this does occur, he concluded, I trust the dissenting jurymen will be a greengrocer—or a cheesemonger.

Mrs. Annie Besant was the most wonderful female orator I ever heard. She was the only one who could speak for an hour or more and not remind the audience that she was a woman. Like the man in the song: it was not exactly what she said but the way she said it. The tritest commonplace uttered earnestly in that beautiful contralto voice sounded like the profoundest wisdom. There was no doubt about her earnestness. She was the most loyal disciple, whether the master for the time being was Charles Voysey, Thos. Scott, Moncreux Conway, Charles Bradlaugh, Herbert Burrows or Madame Blavatsky. Some people thought that when she became a theosophist she would finish up in the Roman Catholic Church. Mr. Foote said: No! All that church could offer a woman was work and silence. Mrs. Besant would not be afraid of the work. I remember once engaging her to speak for the Lambeth Branch which held its meetings in the Progressive Club in Kennington Road. I think at that time she was full of Socialism and Bryant and Mays. It was on a week night and had been snowing for some days. There was no L.C.C. in those days or Borough Councils and the roads were ankle-deep in freezing slush. At the end of the meeting I offered to secure her a cab which would take her to the underground railway the other side of Westminster Bridge where she could take train to St. John's Wood where she resided. But no, she would not hear of it. She was now one of the proletariat. She would walk!

We all loved her and hated the Rev. Frank Besant, her husband, who deprived her of the custody of her children. Annie has told the story of her unhappy married life in two—or was it three—autobiographies. Frank Besant, as far as I know, never said anything at all about it. I wonder!

"But oh ye lords of ladies intellectual

Inform us truly—have they not henpeck'd you all."

Mr. George Bernard Shaw has told how Mrs. Besant once proposed an unregistered marriage with him, but she produced such a formidable list of conditions that the girl-shy Shaw decided, at least for the time, to remain in his state of single-blessedness. But, of course, it has to be remembered that in matters affecting the N.S.S., G.B.S. allows his imagination to usurp the function of memory.

I spent about twenty years on the Freethought platform and as I possessed a loud, resonant voice may be said to have made a little noise in the world. But my greatest success as an orator was achieved under peculiar circumstances at the Birmingham Town Hall. It was at the public meeting which always follows the N.S.S. Annual Conference at Whitsun. Between the Conference and the evening meeting I went for a stroll round the town with another delegate. This gentleman had a profound dislike for the place. He recalled the time when the town was famous for making counterfeit money. They had manufactured bogus articles ever since. It was the manufactory of shoddy

goods. The population had a shoddy mentality. It was a waste of time to place before them anything of a scientific or philosophic character. Like casting pearls, etc.

The hall that night was packed—free admission—but none of our speakers was in his best form. Mr. Foote, who had been speaking a deal at the Conference during the day, had an attack of that throat complaint which in his latter years played such havoc with his beautiful voice. When my turn came to address the meeting I remembered what my companion of the afternoon had told me about their mentality and gave them a string of what I regarded as cheap witticisms. They rose to it like one man. The laughter and applause were positively embarrassing. I had to pause after each "joke" for fear it should spoil the effect of the next one.

Many of us were staying in the same hotel and some had decided to spend the Monday at Stratford-on-Avon. Mr. Foote, however, had to hurry back to London. After breakfast he called me aside and said: "Before I go, Davies, I want to congratulate you on the splendid show you put up last night. You really saved the situation. Take my advice, my boy; stick to that line. Don't try to be clever; just be yourself!"

F. A. DAVIES.

## GOD AND US

IN view of the spate of thanksgiving to "God" which has flowed since VE-Day, it may be well to question the value and reasonableness of days of prayer and thanksgiving.

In the Book of Common Prayer (Oxford U.P. edition, page 41) we have a prayer for "moderate rain and showers, that we may receive the fruits of the earth to our comfort and to thy honour"; and next a prayer for fair weather, which after pointing out to "God" that he once, for the sin of man, drowned all the world except eight persons and afterwards mercifully promised never to destroy it so again, goes on "We humbly beseech thee, that although we for our iniquities have worthily deserved a plague of rain and waters, yet upon our true repentance wilt send us such weather, as that we may receive the fruits of the earth in due season; and learn both by thy punishment to amend our lives and for thy clemency to give thee praise and glory."

Those prayers may be taken to indicate the belief on the part of Anglicans that "God" can play about with the weather as he wishes.

The Prime Minister on VE-Day, Tuesday, May 8, 1945, moved in the House of Commons that the House do now adjourn and proceed to the Church of St. Margaret's, Westminster, for a service of thanksgiving. The King, broadcasting at 9 p.m. the same day, said:—

"To-day we give thanks to God for a great deliverance. In the hour of danger we humbly committed our cause into the hands of God and He has been our shield."

The value of all this mumbo-jumbo is shown by the following record of our National Days of Prayer, etc.:—

- May 26, 1940.—National Day of Prayer: Belgium capitulated.
- June 9, 1940.—National Day of Thanksgiving for Dunkirk: Italy entered the war against us (10th).
- June 16, 1940.—National Day of Prayer for France: Petain sued for peace (16th-17th).
- September 8, 1940.—National Day of Prayer: Intensive bombing of London (7th). Hitler stole a march on "GOD."
- March 23, 1941.—National Day of Prayer: "Sunday Dispatch" claimed capture of Keren and Harar in Eritrea.

September 7, 1941.—National Day of Prayer: Nil.

January 1, 1942.—National Day of Prayer in U.S.A.; Gt. Britain and others joined: Manila fell and Japs advanced through Burma (2nd).

March 29, 1942.—National Day of Prayer: Nothing happened except retreat in Burma.

September 3, 1942.—National Day of Prayer: Nil.

May 18, 1943.—Day of Thanksgiving for victory in North Africa.

September 3, 1943.—National Day of Prayer: Landing in Italy.

September 12, 1943.—Thanksgiving; "the King's wish: For Italy's surrender.

April 23, 1944.—Special prayers for the opening of the Second Front in Normandy, on June 6: Wind and sea very much against us. N.E. gale, week ended 24th; wrecked our craft and held up the "build-up."

September 3, 1944.—National Day of Prayer and Dedication: B.B.C. announcer at 9 p.m. (4th) said, "To-day the weather on the French battlefront went from bad to worse, making air activity a washout." Later in September several newspaper and radio reports said our worst obstacle was the weather and this continued until the end of October.

The record speaks for itself!

W. THURGOOD.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EMBURY, Parliament Hill Fields; 3.30 p.m., Mr. L. EMBURY.

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., S. K. RATCLIFFE: "The End of a Great Age."

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S.—Sunday, Ramble; meet Lickey Terminus, 3.30 p.m., tea at Cofton Tea Rooms at 5 p.m.

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

Blyth.—Monday, June 11, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

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

Cliviger (Lancs.).—Wednesday, June 13, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. G. GARRERTY will lecture.

Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, June 8, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will lecture.

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S.—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

New Ryo.—Thursday, June 14, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

North Shields.—Tuesday, June 12, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

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

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Cardiff Branch N.S.S. (Severn Road School).—Friday, June 15, at 7.30 p.m., discussion and lecture.

## THOMAS PAINE: PIONEER OF TWO WORLDS

I SUPPOSE I have almost every book in English on Thomas Paine, and I have read them all, noted them and compared them, for I do not value them by their rarity, their size or their bindings; I value them first according to their authors' appreciation and sympathetic understanding of the man Paine, his life and his works—pedantic accuracy, fresh information and new theories are almost secondary considerations, and in any case, without the first qualities, the secondary ones are usually valueless.

Chapman Cohen's little book, "Thomas Paine," with its excellent subtitle, "Pioneer of Two Worlds" (Pioneer Press), fulfils every requirement in all my standards of valuation, and this precious fifteen penn'orth is now on its way to be bound luxuriously.

Mr. Cohen gives a clear and accurate outline of Paine's life and work, and his book is an encouraging prelude for all whom one can persuade to study Paine. Although Paine was writing and fighting over 150 years ago, his concise and vibrant words, together with the stimulating example of his warm-hearted humanitarianism and his generous selflessness, are as important to-day to the people of the whole world, as they were to the two worlds in his own times that tried men's souls.

Paine is an introduction to fine thinking. He is easy to understand, for he wrote for the people—or, as Bertrand Russell put it: "He made the preaching of democracy democratic"—and as he reasons, he calls in your heart to spur you on. There are a hundred or so books by a variety of authors and on a number of specialised subjects which one could recommend as essential reading for intelligent students of the main problems we are faced with to-day, but a preliminary course of Paine's life and works is a healthy and practical preparation in ethics and logic.

In support of this theory of the unusual worthiness and usefulness of Paine, consider Mr. Cohen's summing up:—

"If any single man deserves to be called the creator of Modern Democracy, it is Thomas Paine. If any man deserves to be singled out as the one who popularised religious heresy, it is Paine. The story of his life is both an epic and a romance. He was loved as few reformers have ever been loved, and many of those who gave him their affection are even to-day counted among the greatest of his period. But he was hated with a wholeheartedness that only a combination of threatened vested interests and religious malignity can produce. For a whole generation he served as a rallying point for all classes of reformers. Men and women went cheerfully to prison for selling his writings, and came from prison to continue the crime for which they had been sentenced. Special Acts were passed to restrict his influence. Governments went in fear of him. He had that unquenchable hatred of tyranny that draws its strength from a deep sense of justice and a love of humanity. In reply to the famous saying 'Where Liberty is, there is my country,' he retorted 'Where Liberty is not, there is mine.' In these words he summed up one aspect of his life and expressed the whole of his nature."

If you want corroboration of Mr. Cohen's high opinion of Thomas Paine, I can refer you to a host of others, including Walt Whitman, Andrew Jackson, George Jacob Holyoake, J. M. Robertson, Sicysès, John Dos Passos, R. H. Mottram, Harold Laski and Kingsley Martin. I will quote only two:—

"The time is rapidly approaching when Thomas Paine will be acknowledged as one of the great men of all time."—T. A. EDISON.

"Thomas Paine was probably the most useful man that ever existed upon the face of the earth."—ELIHU PALMER (the American Deist).

Actually the time has not been so rapidly approaching when this "forgotten man" will be generally acknowledged as one of the great ones of all time, as Edison expected—for the simple reason that Paine was a religious heretic. Of Quaker stock, he preached for the Wesleyans as a young man and then, till his death, he was a Deist. But that was not enough, in the eyes of the clerics of all denominations, to excuse him for having written "The Age of Reason."

A considerable part of Mr. Cohen's book is rightly devoted to this work and to the argument that Paine's religious heresy was the main cause of his being ostracised by historians, to say nothing of being so shamefully neglected and insulted in his old age. There was always a majority of thinking people who sympathised with Paine's political heresies, although the number of open supporters in that period when our government was experimenting in Gestapoism, was reduced one way or another by the harsh measures taken against political heretics by the ruling oligarchy; but when Paine applied logic, reason and humanitarianism to an analysis of established religions, although his views are accepted to-day by clerics of all creeds, he put himself beyond the pale. It was the last straw and many of his political supporters then deserted him. It resulted in a mean and wicked campaign against Paine and we owe thanks to Mr. Cohen for the convincing way he has dealt with this phase of Paine's life. It gave me particular pleasure, as it has always been my own theory that "The Age of Reason" was the cause of the conspiracy to bury Paine's memory with his bones, and I am grateful, too, for the quotation from Moneure Conway with which Mr. Cohen ends: "So long as a link remains . . . binding reason or heart, Paine's 'Age of Reason' will live. It is not a mere book—it is a man's heart."

ADRIAN BRUNEL.

## SHELLEY AND BYRON

SHELLEY was just as much an aristocrat as Byron, his father being one of the richest landowners in Sussex. But Shelley looked at life from a different angle to that of his friend Byron. Shelley's objects were not hours of idleness, nor the love affairs of Don Juan, but Atheism and Republicanism. It is indeed the Alpha & Omega of his poetry. It is seen in the splendid rhetoric of "Queen Mab," in the nobler music of the "Revolt of Islam," and in his masterpiece, "Prometheus Unbound." And Shelley meant every word that he wrote. Because of Shelley's Atheism, society gave the poet a bad name and a worse time and would gladly have imprisoned him.

**CHALLENGE TO RELIGION** (a re-issue of four lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester), by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

**THE MOTHER OF GOD**, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; by post 4d.

## JUST PUBLISHED

A Pioneer of Two Worlds

# THOMAS PAINE

By CHAPMAN COHEN

An Essay on Paine's Literary, Political and Religious Activities

Price 1s. 4d., post free