

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Medicine Man, Ancient and Modern

IN a savage tribe the medicine man and the magic worker are natural and inevitable figures. They are natural because they are of a piece with the rest of the social structure. They are inevitable because in his gropings after knowledge man learns by trial and failure, only finding the truth after many experiences of the false. Moreover, these experts in the supernatural have plenty of work on hand. Being in direct touch with that world of spirits which play so large a part in primitive life, they arrange for success in war and prosperity in peace. They procure good crops and avert disease. They interpret all the signs and wonders that surround man, and subdue him to order or inspire him to action. They interpret omens on the birth of a child, and prescribe the proper methods of attending to the ghost after the individual is dead. If the rest of the tribe has to support the primitive priest, he can at least be said, in a sense, to earn his keep. For the savage does not see how he could get along without him. The primitive community begs the priest to help *it*, the modern priest begs the community to help *him*. The positions are reversed; and herein lies a very important moral.

Time passes, and the relations of the priest to the community undergoes a profound change. Things that the priest alone could do other people accomplished without him. Strength, skill and organisation in warfare are seen to be more important than incantations. The gods, ancient and modern, are on the side of the big battalions. The Army chaplain is not invited to the Council of War. He blesses the guns, but no one blames him if the gunner misses his object or praises him if the gun shoots straight. He blesses the Army, but if it is unsuccessful it is the generals who are blamed, not the parsons. If the crops are bad, we blame the weather or the soil. We don't say that the gods have nothing to do with the case, but we act as if we believe it. If disease rages, we appeal to the doctor, not to the priest. Even the pious, when called on to deal with an outbreak of cattle disease, take the opinion of scientists, and never once consult any of our highly esteemed preachers. We do not go to the priest to find out the cause of an eclipse, or explain the significance of an epidemic. Nature, as a whole, has put off the livery of the gods, and God's uniformed servants wander about without any definite or reliable instructions from their master. All that God does, apparently, is exist. What he does no one knows; and a large number have ceased to care.

In civilised countries the conditions that gave birth to the priest no longer exist. The frame of mind that called for his help is gone; his function, as a priest, is dead. He

is as much a rudimentary organ in the body politic as the caudal appendage is in the human body. But he is still with us, still prominent in our social life, still demanding support from the community, and accusing it of lack of duty when it is not forthcoming. It is not important to inquire how many of him there are still with us, nor is it important to find out just how much he costs. The really important inquiry is the part he plays in life. Obviously, he cannot exist on the same terms that governed his existence in primitive communities. He may exert much the same influence—I believe he does—but the outward reasons for his existence must be different. He no longer pleads supernatural reasons for his existence; he does not threaten supernatural penalties if we suggest his abolition. Both the justification and the penalties are social in form; and, although this is really giving up the ghost, it is on this ground that he must be met.

One curious feature about an attack on the priest is that he has so few open defenders. (I am using the word "priest" in a very comprehensive sense as embracing all varieties, from the Roman Catholic at the one extreme to the "advanced" Nonconformist at the other.) A great many people will join with the Freethinker in denouncing the priesthood, but they will point to the good men among them as proof of the value of religion, to bad ones as evidencing the weakness of human nature, or offer the correction that the evils we ascribe to religion are really due to theology. There are three fallacies here in as many statements. Good and bad men are found in every direction, and in any case I am not concerned with whether the clergy represent good or bad types of human nature. I am only concerned with the influence of the clergy as an organised body; and that, too, only so far as it is a necessary influence. So far as it is accidental, it may be set on one side altogether, whatever its nature may be. To attempt to draw a distinction of any consequence between religion and theology is stupid. The bare belief in supernatural beings or in God, by itself, would be neither good nor bad. It is what man believes to be the relations existing between the gods and himself, and the way in which this influences conduct, that is of importance, and it is the statement of these relations that constitutes a theology. There never has been a religion without a theology, and there never will be one. And, as a religion implies and involves a theology, so a theology involves some sort of a priesthood. The three hang together, an inseparable trinity in actual fact.

Now, it is a truism that the organised priesthoods of the world have been hostile to progress. I need not labour the point; it is conceded in the mere fact that each one admits it as true of all the others. Special individuals may here and there have taken the side of reform; special circumstances may for a season have ranged a body of the clergy on the side of reform; but, special circumstances aside, the truth remains that the clergy of all denominations and in all countries are found the supporters of retrogressive ideas.

This phenomenon is so general and so uniform that it cannot be accidental. It must be due to something that has its origin in the very function of a priest in all societies immediately above the lowest stage of culture. Personally, I believe it will hold good even there; but I confine myself to the more easily demonstrable proposition.

This proposition is a very simple one: it is that the existence of every clergy, every priesthood, is bound up with the perpetuation of certain ideas quite irrespective of their truth or utility. Progress, we may say, depends on a continuous readjustment of opinion to new needs and a widening circle of information. No man and no society is truly progressive unless he and it holds beliefs as subject to whatever modifications increased knowledge may demand. To the true progressive the past is a book to be consulted, not an oracle to be slavishly obeyed. A new truth is something to be sought for; an opponent one to be welcomed for whatever light he may shed, not an enemy to be repulsed at all costs. On the other hand, the existence of the priest, as priest, depends upon the maintenance of beliefs that all verifiable knowledge tends to discredit. Although he exists in the present, he belongs to the past, and his power is exactly proportionate to his success in keeping the present in line with the past. His function is to hand on established opinions, not to create new ones. His is not only "not to reason why"; it is his task to prevent others reasoning why, or even to feel the necessity for so doing. Instinctively he feels, with an acuteness of perception that is curiously manifested by all vested interests, that a new idea is a fervent that may react disastrously on his position: Self-preservation, the first law of existence for institutions as for organisms, sets the priest in opposition to reform. Oppose it he must; to promote it is an act of class suicide.

The evil does not end here. A class that merely became identified with retrogressive ideas would exert but little influence. It would be known for what it was, and valued accordingly. Their success in safeguarding their status and function is really dependent upon the degree to which they are able to mould character. An historic tradition—little honoured by the wisest teachers in all ages—gives them a prominent place in this matter. In that, and in matters of education generally, they still claim a prescriptive right to express an opinion. And yet the fact remains that of all classes in the community the priesthood is the worst possible for the work. Men who commence their career by pledging themselves to a set confession of faith, and continue teaching it by setting upon it an interpretation quite at variance with its plain meaning, must make the worst possible teachers and moulders of character. The secular teacher may be inefficient, but in that case he merely fails. The priestly teacher really aims to distort, and where he is allowed a free hand he rarely fails in his work. Their object is to give a decisive bent to the mind, and one that is fatal to a really healthy citizenship. Men who think more of where an opinion may lead than of the evidence for its justification can never either be genuine seekers for truth themselves or train others to the task. They would far rather see people grow up timid and credulous than strong with the strength that is born of fearless questioning and honestly expressed doubt. The purpose of every medicine-man, from the savage to the Nonconformist preacher, is to train people to become dependent on his ministrations,

not to walk boldly in a path of their own choosing. By tradition and by training, by love of ease and lust of power, the clergy are thoroughly unfitted for the work of education or the healthy moulding of character. Every good teacher is interested in the ideas he gives his pupils; but the teacher whose existence, as a teacher, is bound up with the perpetuation of a special set of ideas is the most dangerous of all social forces.

Consider the character of those feelings aroused and maintained by religious discipline. The most generous of them are limited by the boundaries of a faith, the less generous by puny sectarian divisions. So far as people outside the faith or sect are considered, they are thought about as potential converts. The larger, healthier, humanitarian note is quite lacking. Unconsciously, this is admitted by the appeal to "Christian men and women" and "Christian feeling" when religious leaders are striving to rouse their followers to a sense of duty. Of course, it may be said that Christian feeling represents the highest to these people. This may be so, but the apology carries its own condemnation. For that, surely, is not the *best* teaching, which owes all its influence to appeals to what is essentially a sectarian feeling. It is but a poor defence to clerical training to argue that under its influence people are so poorly developed that appeals based on a sense of common humanity fall upon practically deaf ears.

It is the system, not the individual, that I am attacking. Systems and castes mould men, just as surely as men create castes and systems. The medicine man, ancient or modern, is not born but made. He is the creature of a system, just as he strives to make others its victims. Each class has its own special code of honour, and the mischief is that the clergy possess a caste morality of its own that tends to subvert the workings of a healthier social consciousness. For the "greater glory of God" almost anything becomes permissible; moral responsibilities that obtain elsewhere break down here. The story—probably apocryphal—told of Bunyan may be applied here. "There but for the grace of God go I," he said, on seeing a criminal led to execution. Were any of us in the pulpit, bound by its traditions, and swathed in its teachings, we all might behave as does the priest. It is not the man that spoils the religion, it is the religion that spoils the man. And that is the ultimate reason for its destruction.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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## ENGLAND IN PLANTAGENET TIMES

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THE reign of Edward I. (1272-1307) was one of the most memorable in our island in the later Middle Ages. On his return from one Crusade, this energetic ruler found home affairs too distracting to undertake another. The Welsh Prince Llewellyn refused to acknowledge Edward's suzerainty, and an arduous campaign was perforce undertaken to restore his overlordship in the Principality of Wales. In 1284, Edward annexed Wales and introduced English law into the conquered territory. In 1301 the English king proclaimed his first born son whose birth took place in Carnarvon Castle, as the first English Prince of Wales, a title our Crown Princes have borne ever since.

Variance with France was intensified by the Welsh uprising, as well as Scottish antagonism. For with the ending of the direct line of Scotland's kings, Edward intervened, and his commissioners made John Balliol king. But Balliol demurred to the arbitrary claims of the English ruler, allied himself with Edward's enemy Philip IV. of France, and disavowed his allegiance. In the ensuing conflict Balliol was taken captive. Later, however, during Edward's absence in Flanders the Scots rallied under the leadership of the heroic Wallace and discomfited an enemy army at Stirling Bridge. But, after arranging peace with Philip IV., Edward overcame the Scots at Falkirk, ultimately captured Wallace, and put him to death. Still, the valiant Scots arose again under Robert Bruce when, in 1307, Edward died on the eve of his projected reinvasion of Caledonia.

Despite his seeming piety, Edward was a sound legislator and remains famous as the English Justinian. At this period Church lands comprised at least one-third of our soil and, as ecclesiastical estates never lacked an heir and were free from several feudal obligations, the statute *De Religiosis* now forbade further grants of landed property to the Church. Also the statute *Quia Emptores* simplified procedure regarding sub-divided tenancies and tended to make many minor landholders directly responsible to the king. Entailed estates were now legalised and, where the conditions originally imposed by the Crown had fallen into abeyance, the king was now permitted their repossession.

At this time the Jews played a conspicuous part in economic affairs. Their services were largely beneficent, but they obstinately refused baptism, and this was a cardinal sin in the eyes of the priestridden populace. So the persecuted people were compelled to attire themselves in humiliating apparel and in 1290 were banished from the realm. So popular was this expulsion that Parliament expressed its approval by making the king a special money grant.

The administrative reforms of Edward are noteworthy. By the close of his reign three Common Law Courts had arisen, although the Supreme Court became still more distinctly the Crown Council. Money matters were the province of the Court of Exchequer; the Court of King's Bench determined criminal cases; the Court of Common Pleas tried civil suits. The circuits of the itinerant justices were instituted; assize judges regularly officiated in civil proceedings, and justices of jail delivery judged criminal charges.

An urban and rural middle order was now represented in Parliament. In this assembly, the Model Parliament of 1295, peers, bishops and abbots, two knights from each county, and burgesses from five score cities and boroughs, with a sprinkling of the lower clergy made up the body. The barons sat with the knights and citizens but the clergy gathered separately in Convocation to raise revenue for the Crown. The lesser clergy, however, soon ceased to attend, while the knights with their higher social standing, joined the burgesses in what afterwards evolved into the House of Commons. Meanwhile, the barons and bishops grew into the House of Lords. Then, as now, money was an ever present need. So while Edward was away in Flanders in 1297, Parliament seized the occasion to exact from the king a confirmation of the Charters which declared that the Crown should receive no further grants save with the consent of the realm. Edward, however, was granted Papal absolution—presumably for value received—which released him from the solemn oath he had sworn. Still, an attempt had been made to weaken the royal prerogative and diminish the powers of the monarch himself.

The first Edward was succeeded by the second, during whose tragic reign the barons were openly insurgent. Edward II. was a weak ruler much under the influence of favourites of shady character. These pampered parasites were justly viewed with

aversion by the haughty and imperious barons, and the royal favourites were given short shrift.

To add to the trouble, Robert Bruce expelled the English garrisons from Scotland, so Edward having succeeded in temporarily pacifying the barons was able to raise a very large army for the invasion of Scotland and the severe punishment of the presumptuous Scots who had dared to array themselves against the majesty and might of England. But unfortunately Edward the II.'s army was utterly routed at the Battle of Bannockburn; the Scots regained their independence and the English king's prestige sank to zero. The conflict between the Crown and baronage was resumed; the king was deposed by Parliament, and then secretly murdered.

The third Edward was a romantic personality whose reign witnessed the opening stages of the disastrous Hundred Years' War with France. Much has been made of the English victories of Crécy and Poitiers, but at the end of Edward III.'s reign nothing of France remained in English possession save the ports of Calais, Brest, Bayonne and Bordeaux.

Far more economically advantageous was the contemporary rise and development of the opulent woollen industry, so important in overseas commerce. The Black Pestilence of this reign swept away a heavy percentage of the population and it proved legislatively impossible to resist the peasants' demand for increased wages for labour on the land. Consequently many large landholders converted their arable acres into pasture runs for the raising of sheep. The insensate struggle with France seriously incommoded England's trading relations with Flanders where the bulk of our wool was transformed into cloth. Fortunately, Flemish weavers came over to our island and founded the English woollen industry.

The war was a severe strain on England's resources. The Crown was compelled to repudiate its debts to foreign bankers and discontent became general. This, perhaps, emboldened Parliament to exact a nominal pledge from the king that grievances should be redressed before supplies to the Crown were granted. In 1376, not merely was an audit of the king's accounts called for, but two dishonest officials were charged and convicted and the practice of impeachment was initiated.

The Popes were then resident in Avignon and abroad they were regarded as mere puppets of the French rulers. The unpopularity of the Papacy is shown in the passing of the Statute of Provisors in 1351 which made Papal appointments illegal, and the trial of suits beyond the English king's realm was made illegal two years later. This last enactment cut off the handsome Papal revenues derived from suits tried in foreign courts. Again, the tribute Pope Innocent III. wrung from John now fell into arrears and when the Pope protested, Parliament with the king's approval declared that as "the Lords and Commons had never consented to John's promised payments his promise was not binding upon the country."

The unpopularity of Papal authority doubtless contributed to the reformer Wiclif's comparative safety and temporary success. This Oxford scholar and formerly Master of Balliol College who died in his bed in 1384, excited widespread attention and agreement when he denounced the corruption of the clergy and urged confiscation by the Crown of the possessions of depraved priests. Then, enthused by the Great Schism of 1378, and the Papal Bulls hurled against him, Wiclif derided both the doctrine of transubstantiation and Papal authority in religion. He also announced the Protestant theory that the Scriptures alone serve as a sufficient guide to eternal bliss. But these teachings proved too far in advance of the time. Edward III.'s son, John of Gaunt, who had befriended Wiclif, now forsook him, and the animus of the clergy grew more and more menacing, so he unwillingly retired from public life. Still, he lent material aid in the earliest known translation of the Bible into English and his disciples, the Lollards, disseminated his doctrines throughout the land until their virtual extinction during the clerical reaction

with its persecuting legislation under Henry IV. This ruler occasionally placated the priesthood by burning a heretic, but his more devout successor, Henry V., persecuted on a far more extensive scale. Thus, after the martyrdom of Sir John Oldcastle, Lollardry virtually disappeared, save as a subterranean movement. As such, it lingered even in London until the Reformation, when it re-emerged into the light of day.

T. F. PALMER.

## BABIES AND SCIENCE

THE following splendid letter, signed by Dr. J. V. Duhig, appeared in the May 4 issue of "The Daily Telegraph" (Sydney, New South Wales, Australia):—

"SIR,—It is dangerous for people to make scientific progress a moral issue. Anæsthetics and evolution should have taught the religious cranks and self-appointed moralists a lesson. But, no; and so decent people are vilified and slandered as only the priest knows how.

"The main opposition to artificial insemination comes from a wealthy Church whose partisans are always burbling about 'the moral law.' What on earth is 'the moral law'?"

"The groups who set themselves up as moral guides ask me to reject the truth of evolution and, at the same time to accept, without the faintest shred of evidence, trinities, angels, human parthenogenesis, theophagyl lambs' blood baths, resurrections, and all the primitive rubbish intelligent folk contemptuously reject as necessary to moral health. This surely is insane. These 'moral guides' backed Mussolini in Abyssinia, Japan in Manchuria, Hitler, Mussolini and Franco in Spain.

"Artificial insemination, like eating meat on a Friday, is morally neutral; it is solely a matter of individual choice. If the partners to a sterile marriage agree to use the method there is no further argument on the moral aspect.

"Parties to a sterile marriage should have the right to dissolve the partnership after five years if it can be medically proved that a family is impossible. If, however, the couple have formed such a deep attachment that separation is not desired, and if one partner genuinely desires a child, I can see no possible moral objection to artificial insemination consented to by both; and, moreover, I would consider it immoral for outside people to interpose a legal bar to such a course.

"Like the evolution controversy 80 years ago, the artificial insemination issue will cost the Churches thousands of secessions; it will not gain them one single convert. More than ever common people hate clerical intrusion in their private lives. I like the prospect of ecclesiastical defeat because I think that ethical sanctions should be human and rational, not supernatural and fraudulent."

The name of the writer of this letter is already admiringly known to readers of "The Freethinker" through his freethought contributions previously published in that paper.

Dr. Duhig, who has long held a medical professorial position in Queensland, is a nephew of Dr. James Duhig, a Catholic Archbishop in that State.

"The Telegraph" is a Sydney daily, with a circulation of 300,000 copies. Is there a comparable paper in Britain or America so defiant of the Churches—so daringly contemptuous of the superstitious spirit of at least some of its readers—as to publish the letter to which Dr. Duhig here appends his name? I most certainly do not think so.

A further point of interest is that the publicity given to such anti-Church views is a most happy, encouraging augury of the present-day trend in Australian thought and feeling.

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

## VULGAR ERRORS

ONCE upon a time there was a philosopher named Sir Thomas Browne who wrote, *inter alia*, two works with hard names—"Pseudodoxia Epidemica" and "Hydriotaphia."

In the former, the author sought to expose the Vulgar Errors, the numerous fallacies and delusions which were prevalent in his day; the latter was an account of the practice of urn burial suggested by the discovery of some Roman urns at Burnham, in Norfolk. Sir Thomas Browne was born in London in 1605, he became a doctor of medicine and "was much resorted to for his skill in physic." He travelled extensively, was an accomplished linguist, and favourably known to Evelyn, Ray, Ashmole, Anthony a Wood and other literary and scientific celebrities of his day.

Sir Thomas revelled in his subject, no marvels were too prodigious, or visionary, for his analysis. Though devoutly orthodox, he quoted the proverb, "*Ubi tres medici duo athei*," and gave instructions that the works of a pagan philosopher should accompany him to the shades: "On my coffin I desire may be deposited my leather Elzevir Horace, *comes viæ ritæque dulcis et utilis*."

The Philosopher, though concerned with exposing errors and superstitious beliefs, was himself eminently credulous. He believed in planetary influence, astrology, alchemy, magic, chiromancy, giants and witchcraft. His intervention in the trial before Sir Matthew Hale at Bury St. Edmunds of two victims of the belief in witchcraft, probably decided their unhappy fate. Sir Thomas stated that the fits to which the accused women, Rose Cullender and Amy Dany, were subject, were "natural; but heightened by the devils co-operating with the malice of the witches."

Most of the fallacies and delusions prevalent in the Philosopher's day have passed away; but many curious instances of ignorance and credulity still persist.

Not long ago it was reported in the Press that Abergavenny farmers wished to obtain the opinion of the Minister of Agriculture on the momentous question, "Do lizards sting sheep?" One farmer asserted that he knew from personal experience that they did so. On being informed that the only venomous reptile in this country is the adder, he replied: "I know fields where adders have never been seen, but if sheep are put there they are stung."

The belief that a child's caul will safeguard its possessor from drowning was revived during the last war. The danger to seafarers, owing to our enemy's "sink at sight" submarine campaign, was the cause, and the price of the charm which had fallen to four or five shillings rose to as many pounds. What the price is now I do not know; but I remember seeing the following advertisement in Plymouth some seventy years ago: "For Sailors. To be sold within, a Child's Caul," the price was a guinea. Owing to the greater security of life at sea in later years this belief had nearly died out, its reappearance shows how promptly a latent superstition may revive.

The late Sir Jagadis Bose in his interesting work entitled "Plant Autographs," devoted a chapter to the Praying Palm of Faridpore, which was said to bow in response to the sound of temple bells at the hour of evening prayer. This was regarded as a miracle and numbers of pilgrims came to witness the devotions of the tree. Sir Jagadis proved that the declension and elevation were due to a regular fall and rise of temperature, and that "not only the Praying Palm but every tree and its different organs perceive changes in the temperature and environment and execute movements in response to them."

A curious error, which indicates how many people fail to recognise the common facts of nature, is caused by the appearance in spring of a fine yellow dust which accumulates in the neighbourhood of pine woods. People write to the Press referring to

this "sulphurous substance," and after the great eruption of La Soufriere, letters appeared stating that quantities of "powdered sulphur" had fallen in Surrey and Hampshire—it was the pollen of the Scotch Pine.

The accounts of toads enclosed in lumps of coal, clay or chalk have been current for so long that it may be said: "The mind of man runneth not to the contrary." Recently one was said to have been "found buried in a coal seam at Netherseal, near Burton-on-Trent, by a collier mining 200 yards below the surface. It is being kept in the manager's office, and is recovering sight and moving about." An amusing variant of this fable, the absurdity of which must be apparent to anyone with an elementary knowledge of geology, was the case of two mischievous boys who mystified their parents, their neighbours, and the Vicar of the parish in which they resided. Lumps of coal and other objects flew about the house which was said to be haunted. The Vicar wrote to a local paper suggesting that the manifestations were the work of a Poltergeist, a monkey spirit. "But how," he asked, "did the spirit find its way into the house?" "Possibly," he suggested, "it might have been imprisoned in the coal and released when it was broken and burnt." We know that "the blue-eyed hag" imprisoned Ariel in a pine tree for twelve years; but that a spirit could be confined in a coal seam, deposited long before the advent of man, seemed so remarkable that I wrote to the Vicar and indicated a simpler solution, which was that he and others had been deluded by pranks played by the boys. This suggestion was ill-received and the Vicar demanded that I should withdraw my "crude and meagre statement," which was, however, very soon substantiated.

Now that war news has ceased to monopolise so much of our attention, the special correspondent will, no doubt, report again the appearance of these mysterious phenomena known as Poltergeists, whose pranks and manifestations are, when investigated, invariably found to emanate from young people, usually girls, on the advent of puberty, an uneasy age. Many people will recall the absurd story of "The Oily Rectory" of Swanton Xovers and the tricks played at the National Laboratory of Physical Research by Elenore Zugun, the Rumanian peasant-child, and her *entrepreneuse* and accomplice, an Austrian Countess.

The persistence among "vulgar errors" of a belief in fairies embarrasses me, for I find that many of my friends possess it. One, an engineer, a prosaic person, informs me that at his home in Scotland his dog constantly sees the Daoine She', who still, it seems, inhabit certain districts in the Kingdom of Fife. My old friend, Lady Archie Campbell, who was a Highland Celt of vivid imagination and poetic fancy, used to assure me that the elfin people still existed in Scotland, and had much to say of wee Katie, who had for generations been the House-spirit of the Campbells. She had not been seen for some time, but signs of her presence were still observed.

In our one-time Sister Isle, a belief in Fairies, Leprechauns and Banshees, is still firmly established among the peasantry. Not long ago an amusing instance of this was reported from Athlone where a labourer named Kilduff was offered an acre of land on which the local Council proposed to build a cottage for him. Kilduff, when he found that there was a Rath, or fairies' home on the site, refused to have anything to do with it. "I will not interfere with it, sure one could never have any luck after," said he, and added, *more Hibernico*, "though my cabin is so windy that a wild duck would get rheumatism in it."

It was reported from Westmeath a few years ago, that a Leprechaun had been seen frequently by children when on their way to school. He was, they said, a little man dressed in white who played on a harp for their amusement. The school teacher was a firm believer in this phenomenon and in reply to a sceptic said: "Sure the children would not be making up stories (do they not always delight in doing so?)—hardly a day passes but they see him; but it appears that I am not to do so."

Another story from Ireland was of an old body who, when applying to the Limatady Pension Committee for assistance, was asked her age. She said that she had a distinct recollection of being born on Hallow-e'en night in 1857, when she was stolen by the fairies. "Are you sure of this?" asked the Chairman. "As sure as that I live," replied the applicant, "but fortunately my brother was returning from Carndonagh; he heard the fairies singing and threw a book among them. The fairies then abandoned me, and my brother lifted me in his arms and took me home." "There was much rejoicing, no doubt," said the Chairman. "Sure there was great joy," said the old body—who got her pension.

In a Cornish village which I knew many years ago the old folks were devout believers in fairies or pixies as they called them, though this was never admitted to strangers.

The presence on our hillsides of "the green-sour ringlots, whereof the ewe bites not," was sufficient evidence of the pixies' moonlight frolics.

It may be noted that in the so-called fairy stories of the Brothers Grimm there is little mention of fairies; in a translation circa 1850, which contains 196 tales, there is a sole mention of fairies. In the rare edition of 1823 there are but two, one "The Elfin Grove" is illustrated by the most delightful of George Cruikshank's wonderful etchings for this work. These etchings, Ruskin declared, "are unrivalled in masterfulness of touch since Rembrandt, in some qualities of delineation unrivalled even by him."

The engaging fairies of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Drayton one would not willingly part withal, but, alas, they are no longer—

"Teaching the little birds to build their nests,  
And in their singing how to keepen rests."

Before the advent of this mechanised and prosaic age (which is responsible for the unwarranted heresy that Cinderella's slippers were not of glass, verre, but of fur, vair), they "gambolled on heaths and danced on every green."

But enough of the Little People, lest I be classed with those that will—

"Be talking of the fairies still;  
Nor never can they have their fill,  
As they were wedded to them."

Many people have heard of the seat with an evil reputation in St. James's Park which is said to entail disaster on the unwary who rest thereon; of the morbid mummy in the British Museum and the occult powers exercised by the ancient Pharaoh which Dr. Madrus, the Egyptologist, is reported to have said were responsible for the sudden death of Mr. Benedite and M. Pasanova, both of whom had taken part in research work in the Valley of the Kings.

The gruesome story of the haunted gems of the London Museum and the eerie experiences of the official and his family who took charge of them will also be remembered.

Fortune-tellers, palmists, crystal-gazers, clairvoyants and other pretenders to occult powers, yet find their dupes everywhere, for a love of the marvellous is common to all nations. It is a legacy from prehistoric times, and from Indus to the Pole, man still invests his life with myth and mystery.

EDGAR SYERS.

#### THOMAS PAINE—AN APPRECIATION

The following is an excerpt from an article in "Country Life," September 14, 1945, entitled "A Country Road to Cromer." "A bronze plaque has been placed by American airmen on the house, near the top of White Hart Street (Thetford), where Tom Paine was born, as a recognition of his great work for the young nation which caused T. A. Edison to describe him as the founder of the American republic." E. S.

## ACID DROPS

According to a notice in "John Bull" the present Secretary of State for War intends to abolish compulsory Church parades. The news seems too good to be true, since it would mean treating soldiers and sailors as though men in the army and navy were independent individuals. We agree that so long as we have armed forces we must maintain discipline and enforce obedience to orders, but it is also plain that if Church parades were voluntary—so far as attendance is concerned—the attendants would be so few that they would serve only to advertise that religious belief is dwindling rapidly. The loud praise of the beauties of freedom that we have had since the war began is considerably discounted when we see grown-up men marched off to a Church service in which, probably, the larger number do not believe. And surely there is enough humbug in the world without making it compulsory with regard to soldiers, sailors and airmen. If we wish freedom really to stand for something, compulsory religious services should be wiped out.

The other week the "Irish Weekly Post" gave an account of a Sister Gertrude's miraculous cure from cancer. It is stated that the doctors, after an explorational operation, declared the disease incurable. Then the Sisters of Clarity began a "Novena" to "Mother Seton," and the patient grew rapidly better, and a Dr. Nix—a Roman Catholic—declared the cure "the result of Divine intervention." Just pausing to wonder who the dickens was Sister Gertrude to receive such attention, the moral of the story—if there is a moral to it—comes in the fact that when Sister Gertrude died a Dr. Walter Seibert, who held the autopsy, declared that "there was no evidence whatever of cancer, not even a scar." To the good Catholic this makes the matter clearly miraculous. That saint had been very effective. We say the good Catholic, who is more ready than others to swallow anything.

The Bishop of Winchester has been visiting the troops in Germany and has concluded that there are great opportunities for the chaplains to do "pastoral, educational and evangelical work among many of our men." The operative word here is "many," and we are fairly satisfied that the tale should properly read "few." One has to consider "many" as a very elastic term, and if actual figures were given it would be found that only here and there are converts made. The movement is steadily away from Christianity. The Bishop concludes that what Germany needs is "a revival of the Christian religion." But if Christianity in Germany could not prevent the dangerous developments we have witnessed, what reason have we for believing that a return to Christianity will be more effective in the future than it has been in the past?

The Rev. M. C. Chakravarty, a Hindu Christian, seems to be very contemptuous of the Christian Church in India. He says quite plainly that the Church is "Indian only in name," the heads of the Church are not Hindus but English, and both Hindus and Moslems "regard the Church in India as English" and is "only a side-show of British Imperialism." Perhaps he feels that when Christians came to India they had the Book and the natives the land. Now the natives have the Book and the Church has a strong hold on the land. Well, there is nothing very startling in this. The teaching of the Church always worked that way. It was a native of Africa who was credited with saying: "The Christian preacher comes and says 'Look up,' and when we look down again the land is gone."

The awful result of Communism in Italy, wails the "Universe," would be the end of the "concordat"—that is, it would be "the severance of relations with the Church, the total suppression of religious teaching in the schools and no real guarantee of freedom of worship." Well, so what? After all, was not Italy at the time of her invasion of Abyssinia almost completely Catholic, and was not one of the joys of Italy's Catholic airmen there to bomb men, women and children merely for the fun of it—for they knew it was impossible for the Abyssinians to retaliate? Was not practically the whole of Italy's Catholic population on the side of Mussolini and behind him in joining hands with Germany? Whatever result a severance with the Pope may bring about in

Italy, it certainly can be no worse than Italy was before the war—it might even be better.

Canon Sutch, of Cirencester, says: "We must evangelise or perish." We agree, but while the Church may spend much energy and money in evangelistic campaigns the result is very, very small. People are not leaving the Churches because they do not understand Christianity, but because they do. Not because they are below Christianity, but because they are above it. It is not the careless or the foolish that deliberately reject religious doctrines, but those who think for themselves, and are ready to face boycott and other difficulties which meet them from bigotry in power. Nor is unbelief peculiar to this or that class of people. To-day it is common to all, and behind them lies the increased knowledge and understanding that is always connected with complete heresy.

Part of what we have said is admitted by Canon Sutch. He says that "the task was not the conversion of the bad, it was the conversion of the good, which was much more difficult." We have been saying that all our life, but we did not expect so deadly a truth to be echoed by a representative of the English Church. In a country where the majority of people are believers in Christianity, or religion in general, it demands a certain amount of courage and understanding on the part of the heretic. Heresy cannot be confessed with a view of making things easy. The man who avows his heresy is often made to pay for it, but he is the better man for the cost paid.

So we are a little surprised to find Canon Sutch expressing the fact that he wishes to recapture the wise and the good. How is he going to do it. Not by being pleasant, surely? If the Atheist is good and intelligent, what has he to gain—intellectually or morally—by returning to the fantastic fairy and goblin-like beliefs of his undeveloped years. To recapture a good and intelligent Atheist means that the man must forget all he knows of both religion and Freethought. And that simply cannot be done. You may apologise to a man for pulling his nose, but you cannot unpull it. A nose once pulled is pulled for ever. We are afraid that if the Canon does secure converts they will come from the classes that leave a church because they do not like the singing, or a wife has fallen out with certain of the worshippers, and so forth. But, given health, it is simply impossible for a man to forget a truth once it has become his.

A different kind of man is the Bishop of Ripon. He was speaking on behalf of an attempt to collect £275,000. He believes that Christian civilisation has been given one more chance. But what for? and who is it that is giving Christianity another chance? Modern science will not give the Christian Church a chance to re-establish the fantastic folk-stories of the Bible, or the mass of worn-out primitive superstitions that constitute the fundamental quality of that collection of writings. It is not, of course, impossible for civilisation to decay, as the ancient civilisations withered before the conquest of the Christian Churches. But that is not likely to happen. Civilisation has planted itself too deeply. Christianity is running its course. It will not die quickly, but it will die.

It is advisable that so long as we have churches we should have theological training colleges. This is not because a theological institution educates but because it will prevent pupils understanding. The whole purpose of a theological training is to stamp on the brains of a number of unfortunate men what they must believe and what they must not on any account believe. The method adopted is not greatly superior to the training which performing animals have to go through.

Of course the truth of this is not openly stated but it is the case. In life as a whole when a man says he believes this or that, one can form a fair idea of what he means. But when one touches theology we need to enquire what branch of religion he belongs to before we can begin to understand him. He must show a label, that his particular church has stamped, on him. There is no real education in theology; there is only instruction.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

Would a "Freethinking Father" be good enough to send his address to this office.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

Mr. Chapman Cohen had almost decided not to go on any long distance journeys for lectures. They cut three days out of a week and that is considerable—all things considered. But he has promised to start the winter season for the West Ham Branch of the N.S.S. He will lecture at the Stratford Town Hall on Sunday, October 21. The Town Hall can be reached from all parts of London by train, tram and bus. The subject will be "Can Christianity Survive?" Doors open at 6.30 p.m., commence 7 p.m.

The place of women in a Christian community is a very, very old question. It is older than Christianity, because it is found in the Bible, where it appears God did his lightning job of making the world—and its contents. It was only after he had made man and all the animals that he bethought himself that being alone would make Adam feel very, very dull. So he made a woman, the product of an after-thought, and the originator of mankind's subsequent troubles. In the New Testament her position is very poor indeed. She appears and pays obedience to Jesus, but when he selected his preachers he never included a woman to be among the twelve selected disciples. And Paul—who appears to have done as much as anyone to promote the "new" religion—was very careful to bellow out the order that women should be quite silent in the Church. Her place was to obey and be silent.

More or less, what is to be done with women, what place might she hold in the Christian community, etc., have been very lively topics. One Church Council actually debated whether a woman was a human being, and only after considerable discussion was it allowed that she was, but the vote was not unanimous. Our own national Church, it will be remembered, has never permitted a woman to preach from the pulpit, but she has been permitted to perform certain duties—such as that of collecting money. Only the other day, after some years of squabbling, the Methodist Church agreed that a woman might preach from the pulpit, but if she gets married she was automatically sacked. At present there is a deal of agitation over this matter in the Scottish Church, and up to date the anti-women crowd have won the day. Of course, the women will win in the long run. But it seems rather hard on a woman to be less than an ordinary preacher and bound to take folk-lore and stupid superstitions as impregnable truths.

It was entirely owing to the earlier printing of this journal that we were unable to notice the successful meeting of the Birmingham Branch of the N.S.S. on Sunday, September 30. The

hall was crowded and Mr. F. H. Hornibrook's lecture on "The Vatican Peril" led to a lengthy and lively discussion that was enjoyed by both speaker and listeners.

At the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow to-day (October 14) the local Secular Society will hold its opening meeting. Mr. R. H. Rosetti will be the speaker, and the subject "God and the Atomic Bomb" looks attractive. The lecture commences at 6.30 p.m., admission is free, with some donation tickets.

Mr. F. J. Corina speaks for the Manchester Branch to-day (October 14) in the Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, Manchester, at 3 p.m., on "Secularism or Christianity?" The local branch is getting into its stride, a good syllabus has been arranged and its many friends will see that it gets the support it deserves. Mr. Corina's subject is itself an invitation to orthodox friends to be present.

The Belfast Branch of the N.S.S. may count to its credit that, at a Protestant meeting, a telegram sent by the Society was read out which insisted upon the right of men and women to spend Sunday otherwise than in praising God. The telegram insisted that the observance of "Sunday" should be left to individuals. Perhaps it was the sheer unusualness of such a claim being made at a Christian meeting that the local papers and "Radio" also published this suggested "desecration of the Sabbath." We congratulate our friends for their activity.

We see that a visit to Belfast by Mr. J. T. Brighton is to be paid during October. We trust there will be a good gathering of Christians to listen to him. The date will be October 28, place Grand Central Hotel (Londonderry Room), chair will be taken at 7.30 p.m.

We are a civilised people. Who says we are? We do. But there are those who with greater modesty are content with saying that we are helping to create a civilisation; and that may have some truth in it, but wise men will refrain from bragging about it. Put it down that a certain number of men and women in different parts of the world strive to make human life better than it is. But if we have a real regard to truth—whether it be pleasant or unpleasant—we shall agree that this last truth may be said of many peoples whom we class as savages but may also be credited with attempts to develop civilisation. Still a cautious and wise man would not brag too lustily that we are working hard to bring to being a really civilised people. Some of the people of the world have perforce trusted each other during the war. The test is, or should be, how long can they trust each other during the period that we are pleased to denominate as "peaceful."

Some justification for what we have said is given by an item of news that we take from a weekly paper—"John Bull." It seems that the B.B.C. is arranging a series of displays on "How Things Began." The series is of an evolutionary quality, and that, of course, is directly condemning the pantomimic description in the Christian Bible. So Mr. Edwin Willie of Cardiff, with others, has created an agitation and reminds us that "Germany went to the dogs by adopting unproven modernistic views and monkey theology." Mr. Willie of Cardiff has sent letters to every Member of Parliament, and we should be greatly surprised if he does not secure a number of supporters. Certainly all the Roman Catholics will be on his side. And outside Parliament there are many, very many, to whom evolution is as Mr. Willie describes it. One thing only brings us to the side of Mr. Willie. He believes that Members of Parliament should say what they believe in the matter. To that the reply is that they are Members of Parliament. Readers will please finish the last sentence.

A friend asked us the other day what did we consider the most effective method of dispersing a crowd. We replied: set it thinking. In sober fact no crowd can stand against it. If politicians and parsons spoke the truth they would agree with us.

## MARIA MONK

RECENTLY Mr. Chapman Cohen referred to a case in Canada in which a man found that his wife had been cohabiting with a priest, and published a pamphlet on his grievance. The answer of the Church was to have him put in an asylum from which he was released by Freethinking friends. In the same article appeared a quotation from an address by Jean Charles Harvey of Quebec, who said: "The one power which in this part of Canada makes all tremble is the clerical power."

These matters called to mind the recent reply of "The Catholic Herald" to a correspondent who had inquired as to the truth of the story of Maria Monk. "The Catholic Herald" naturally said that the disclosures of Maria Monk were a fake, and tried to give added weight to this reply by stating that the book "Disclosures of Maria Monk" circulated mainly in pornographic circles.

The reply that the disclosures are a fake is the inevitable denial of the Church in all such matters, of course, and has just as much testimony value as any other denial of the Church in similar circumstances. But the suggestion that "Maria Monk" circulates mainly in pornographic circles is apt to carry more conviction with sober-minded people, and is one of the subtle ruses by means of which the Church, by telling half-truths, tries to get away with its easy denials among those who care little for pornography. No doubt there is factual truth in the suggestion that this book circulates in such circles to-day, but there is a good deal more in it than that. The restriction of the book to such bookshops and readers is certainly not warranted by the nature of its contents which are far from being pornographic. Indeed, the authoress betrays a strong dislike of pornography, and instead of revelling in such details of sexuality as might apparently have been given if she had desired, she adopts a very restrained approach to that aspect of her story. One of her own comments relating to alleged indecent questions and actions by priests, illustrates this:—

"... it is not my intention to speak of it very particularly because it is impossible to do so without saying things both shameful and demoralising."

The general contents of the book support this statement of the authoress, for she pays much less attention than would appear to be warranted to sexual irregularities in the convent of which she was a member (the Black Nunnery of Montreal) and considerably more attention to the criminal, sadistic, masochistic and fanatical modes of behaviour which she claims to have experienced. So we must look further for the restriction of "Maria Monk" to the pornographic bookshops—and I venture to think we may find it in the fact of boycott. Undoubtedly, the presence of "Maria Monk" in the "legitimate" bookshops would bring out the Villains of the Vatican with their threats of applying the commercial thumbscrews to any bookseller who persisted in its sale. To suggest to a bookseller who values his reputation that he is selling pornography or blasphemy is a trick well understood by all religious agents, and particularly the Roman variety. So "Maria Monk" goes underground, and can usually be purchased only in the shops that have no reputation to lose, or "under the counter" elsewhere, this fact appearing to support the Catholic charge of pornography.

I do not know, but I hazard a guess that a recently published edition of the work by a Manchester firm which seems to have had a good sale in the "holiday bookstalls" of Blackpool and other resorts has been responsible for this latest effort to discredit "Maria Monk." But, underground or above ground, pornographic or not, "Maria Monk" seems to go on selling, and the element of sincerity and truth which the work undoubtedly contains must be a considerable thorn in the side of the Church. A work which has called forth a dozen or more "replies" from Catholic sources can hardly be the tissue of lies it is made out to be.

"To gain its end the Roman Church will stop only when compelled," said Chapman Cohen. That we are sure of, and our knowledge of the fact gives credence to the authoress's statement that several attempts were made, after her escape from the convent, to "recapture" her and take her back or to put her into the custody of another Catholic institution before her child (to a priest) was born. On the publication of her book some time later, there was a hue and cry against both her and the New York publishers, and a good deal of lying went on about a supposed inquiry into the conditions at the convent. But lying, of course, is a time-honoured custom where the interests of the Church are concerned. Whatever else may be true in Maria Monk's "Disclosures," all who know the Church well will be able to credit her story that one day a priest in the convent exclaimed to her: "What! A nun of your age and you do not know the difference between a wicked lie and a religious lie!"

But in the last analysis it doesn't really matter whether Maria Monk is pornographic (though I think it is not) or true in every detail. We have many well-attested records of happenings of a similar nature, and time and again the Church has been impeached upon evidence for the immoral and inhuman practices which it encourages by the segregation of human beings into "holy houses" which must resemble mad houses in many ways due to the unnatural life carried on therein.

My main point was to expose the half-truth method by which Catholic apologists try to dispose of their difficulties. But as there will be at least the same proportion of Catholic pornographers as any others this particular example of verbal dodging will not keep the book out of Catholic hands to the extent desired.

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

## THOUGHTS ON WAR AND PEACE

"Man's inhumanity to man  
Makes countless thousands mourn!"

—ROBERT BURNS.

"For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's comin' yet for a' that,  
That man to man the world o'er  
Shall brithers be for a' that."

—ROBERT BURNS.

It was only natural that the people of the Allied Nations should rejoice at the end of the Second World War. Everyone with a spark of humanity left inside him after long years of intensified "hate" propaganda must be gratified to know that the terrible slaughter is over. Yet there is a feeling of tenseness, emerging into apprehension and fear. Understandably so, for man is now faced with what may be his last chance to rescue civilisation. Even his own survival would seem to be at stake. Obviously, then, there is need for serious thought and action. A few perverted individuals may say that the human race is only fit for extinction (they overlook its magnificent achievements), some will reiterate the old cry that it is impossible to prevent wars, others will resign themselves to what they believe is the will of God. But most people cannot help being worried about the fate of mankind, for it necessarily concerns them. And not just in a selfish way, either. I do not think I am unduly optimistic in thinking that, at bottom, men are concerned about their fellows. Does not daily life prove it? For the most part, men and women are ready to assist the needy (in any sense) as far as they are able to do so. They evince much more than a morbid curiosity in rushing to the scene of an accident; they are sorry for the victim and would like to help if possible. Similar examples of genuine sympathy may be found also in any cinema when unhappiness is portrayed on the screen. The audience is "moved." Unfortunately, a social environment of economic



competition engendering greed and hatred, and an antiquated anti-social morality tend to make us ashamed of our "sentimentalism." Indeed, the very word carries a meaning of shallowness. But there is nothing shallow in being human or humane! On the contrary, we should encourage and enlarge our human sympathies and thereby further human unity.

How absurd it is to feel shame at being humanly sympathetic can be seen by a glance at great literature. Very many of the finest writers of all countries might be cited, but here is an exquisite passage from John Donne, which ought to be as familiar as its ending:—

"No man is an *Island*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends* or of *thine owne* were; any man's *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for thee."

These are my "sentiments"; they are the sentiments of all who deserve the name of Freethinker. I suggest that they are the sentiments with which we must tackle the job of establishing peace in the world. They must form the basis of our approach. To them we must add realism and common sense. Then, and only then, can we begin to solve this most vital of human problems. It will, of course, be a great task. It is difficult to exchange handshakes instead of bayonets, to be friendly after using a flame-thrower or a machine-gun, to be humane after participating in a war. It is hard to treat the Japanese as human beings when one has been told for so long that they are fiends, ape-men, etc.; it is as hard for them to cease hating us, even harder, for they have not experienced the—at least temporary—consolation of victory, but the bitterness of defeat.

We have, in fact, reached the stage when the term "atrocities" has become meaningless. Belsen and Buchenwald epitomise the word for some. But what about the afore-mentioned flame-thrower, and the bombing of helpless citizens (it wasn't "military objective" when Hamburg, Berlin, etc. were devastated, no more than it was when Coventry was bombed!), what of the flying bomb and rocket, and, of course, the atomic bomb. No nation which has participated in this war can accuse any other of barbarism. The guilt is all round, as is inevitable. A war cannot be fought without atrocities, and it is useless attempting to discover degrees of atrociousness. War itself is barbaric, and any nation which goes to war must act in a barbarous manner. War is the supreme atrocity beside which all other atrocities fade, and it is time we ceased talking about it like a game of cricket. Once rationalise the right to kill people of another nation, and the methods adopted become relatively unimportant. Indeed, once admit the validity of killing, and the logical conclusion is that the most efficacious means of doing so are legitimate.

Logic, however, should start earlier than this, and then there would be no need for bloodshed. The basic humanism is waiting to be developed. It displays itself in all of us in our better moments, and it is heartening to remember that it has to be expressly subdued or perverted for war purposes. The ordinary Englishman has no desire to kill a German. He has to be told that it is necessary to do so in order to save humanity from tyranny. Likewise, the ordinary Japanese must have justification for killing Americans. He is therefore taught that the white man is trying to dominate the earth and subject the coloured peoples. A moral appeal is made to both the Englishman and the Japanese (and likewise to all the other nationalities) by their respective rulers, purporting to demonstrate the justness of their respective causes; and there is *some* truth in each of the appeals. Even then the average person does not voluntarily take up arms either in England or Japan. He has to be conscripted, and this, too, is encouraging.

It is true to say, therefore, that the average human being—no matter what nationality he may be—does not want to fight his corresponding member of another nation, and would much rather live at peace with him. There is a splendid foundation upon which to build a peaceful and better world: that is the first requirement and we have it already! The next is the realisation of the interdependence of the nations of the earth, quite apart from any moral considerations. It should be obvious to all who have the slightest acquaintance with economics, that Europe cannot be prosperous around an impoverished Germany. Yet it apparently escapes the notice of politicians! It should be equally clear that Japan still has population problems which need to be solved by one means or another; but the statesmen seem blind to the fact. Many other important factors, too, have been overlooked by the leaders of the Allies. But they are ever ready to prate about the outlawing of war and the establishment of a real peace. San Francisco, they say, has ensured this.

Do they really think so? If so, they are even more foolish than some of us thought. Certain commentators have pointed out that the success of the New League depends on the goodwill of the United Nations, and that is what it actually resolves into. Meanwhile the United Nations are so "united," and so trusting towards each other, that they are bent on annexing as much territory and as many bases as they can for use in case of attack by their present allies. Goodwill does not, apparently, involve Britain's release of Hong Kong to her ally China, who has most right to it. Nor does it mean fair treatment of Poland, to defend whose rights we ostensibly went to war. And there are certainly no signs that the British rulers, who laid such stress on the fight for democracy and freedom, are willing to grant such to the Indians and Africans. Obviously goodwill is not enough when dealing with the intrigues and machinations of governments when faced with the ramifications of modern diplomacy.

Certainly the U.S.S.R. does not consider that San Francisco has eliminated the possibility of a war. No more do Britain and the U.S.A. There is to be peace time conscription and continuous work on ever more deadly armaments lest one lags behind the rest of the world, but there is no international organisation with full control in these matters, backed up by force. There is too much concern for "sovereign rights" to permit that. Too much talk of Big Threes, Fours, Fives and Sixes. In short, too much nationalism and not enough internationalism. The solution rests, as always, with the people. They can only expect from their "leaders" what they have received in the past, namely, trouble. The time has come once and for all to dispense with leaders; to realise to the full the individuality of the common man. What is needed is independent thinking men and women who will work together for the benefit of humanity. That is the Freethought message to a wounded world.

C. McCALL.

#### BUSY SAINTS

Judging from a local newspaper the saints seem very busy in Liverpool. Here are a few examples of the help Roman Catholic saints give the faithful. They are taken from the "Liverpool Echo." It should be said they are all paid advertisements: "Glyn" had notice to leave her flat and could not find another. Prayed to Saint Teresa and the loving heart of Jesus. Got a "wonderful flat." "Sincere thanks to Saint Jude in anticipation." "Thanks to Saint Andrew for great favour." There is a certain shrewdness in one who "Promised safety for family, home and all people in Altear Avenue, Wavertree."

There is hopefulness in one who thanks Saint Jude for successful examination promised. Also there is expressed a certain degree of solidity in one who thanks Saint Jude for providing him with a house. There are many others, but one wonders what would happen if an ordinary person advertised to provide people with houses, students with success in their examinations, etc., etc. We imagine the law would be at work to stop so unmistakable a fraud.

## A WOMAN'S BIBLE

"O woman! lovely woman! nature made thee  
To temper man; we had been brutes without you."

—THOMAS OTWAY.

If woman had been responsible for the compilation of the Bible it is likely that the Deities would have been, for the most part, of the feminine gender, thus:—

"Goddess the Mother, Goddess the Daughter, Goddess the Holy Ghost (or Lady's Maid), and lastly, God the Father."

It is suggested that the idea of a Goddess-head would have been more beneficial to humanity than the influence of the masculine variety of gods. And why not? The idea of the "eternal feminine" as the supernatural feminine is intriguing, for does not the name of woman connote love, companionship, children, and the home?

The Greeks and the Romans had gods and goddesses galore. No favouritism. All the virtues and the vices of mankind were shared among the Deities, so that being endowed with human traits of character, both good and bad, they were easily understood and treated accordingly.

The Goddesses of the Bible are conspicuous by their absence. Even the Devil is a male, that is, as far as we know. This circumstance is peculiar because in view of the fact of the scant courtesy paid to woman by the male compilers of the Bible it is an occasion for wonderment why the Evil One was not portrayed as a she-devil or devilless. But we see that when the story of the Bible unravelled itself, and a miraculous birth was introduced, a woman had to be found. She was not endowed with any supernatural characteristics. Oh, no! She was just a woman—kept in her place as a mere mortal and was spurned by her son, Jesus Christ, who said to her on a certain occasion: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Most unfilial. Under the circumstances any other son would have said: "Mother, just a moment. . . ." The use of the word woman is contemptible and reprehensible.

Now, this is all wrong, and woman has suffered accordingly. It is woman who has been crucified—not the Son of God. Woman should have cut a much better figure, metaphorically speaking, than is now shown in Holy Writ. A woman's Bible would not have given us that mathematical *pons assinorum* "three in one and one in three." As a prime mover in the creation of life she would have been elevated to the loftiest sphere—the Mother Superior of Heaven and Earth, majestic, all-loving, benignant, and just. And the Old Testament with all its atrocities, obscenities, absurdities and contradictions would have read like an up-to-date love romance instead. Diana, the heroine, would be seen at the hunt, with Nimrod "that mighty hunter before the Lord" not as her equal but as her servant.

Despite a few warring celebrities like Joan of Arc and Boadicea, woman, broadly speaking, is, by nature, pacific. The God of the Bible is a veritable Mars, implacable and devastating, the "First Cause" of destruction as a god of War with famine, pestilence and misery following in his wake.

Only a few illustrations of adjustments can be mentioned had woman written the Bible: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with the Goddess and the Word was the Goddess." Cynics must not interrupt and say that woman has the last word as well as the first. In any case, if man behaved himself he would not feel the sting of woman's natural weapon, her tongue. To resume. In the story of the Fall of Man (and Woman) man, being "a deceiver ever," is the culprit. A domestic squabble ended in Adam having his ears soundly boxed, and when the Goddess intervened, Adam, the wretch, laid the blame on Eve. For punishment and for biological reasons, both were packed off to a land not so delectable as Eden, and told

to behave themselves like a respectable married couple. This epoch marks the dawn of self-consciousness or the "Rise of Man" and eliminates that atrocious invention of "original sin." The antics of God and Moses on the mountain, King David's amorous intrigues, Ruth's adventures and a hundred other stories of dubious character would have given place to a romantic story of Samson and Delilah, ending with a reconciliation of the opposing families and the conclusion of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament or Book the Second, the Goddess, alarmed at the continual domestic squabbles of her poor mortals, has a brilliant idea. She would show man the errors of his ways—his Don Juan weakness—by sacrificing a Daughter! Moreover, she would take a part in the plan herself. She sends an emissary to earth to find a suitable earthly Apollo and to arrange an assignation. Having completed her task the emissary returns to Heaven and hands in her report. The Goddess then descends to earth and becomes clothed in flesh. But we, alas, cannot clothe our narrative with the understanding and delicacy which the occasion warrants and must pass over a few years. The Daughter does not carry on like her prototype Jesus Christ (for details see the Apocrypha) nor does she suffer the same fate on a cross after a sordid trial. Nothing so miserable as that. Her death is self-inflicted—an act of propitiation for man's waywardness. On a pyre, prepared by her faithful disciples, the Daughter suffers death by burning—an everlasting reproach to mere man for not keeping to the paths of constancy and probity!

And what of miracles, would they have figured in a woman's Bible? It is difficult to say unless woman considered that man himself was the miracle. Well, in a way he is, and then again in a way he isn't.

S. GORDON HOGG.

## FREE PARDON

THE prisoner's eyes fluttered open under the stare of the warder. The gaoler said, "Sir, you have been long now in this dungeon. Twelve years, I think. But to-day will mark a change—a visitor to see you."

There was a stirring among the rags of garments and skin flayed by hooks. "Tell me, man, what should a visitor want of me?" But the gaoler only smiled, and this pretence of friendship seemed the final mockery. So! perhaps they knew they had done all that could be misdone to his body. Were they now going to see if they could extract some amusement from the torture of his mind? A visitor! The prisoner's friends had been taught, by practical means, to forget him twelve years ago.

Then the priest was bending over him. "My son," said the priest, "you have suffered, but I have prayed that your trial will end. Grace," the priest went on, "is a gift of God. Were you to promise Mother Church one half of your fortune, should you regain your estates. . . ." The prisoner did not answer.

"Even if your heart has hardened," said the priest with a sigh, "I shall not fail to give you your free pardon from our bishop; and, in token of his trust, this. . . See this ring, it is no phantom. If it pleases you, take it; and take with it your freedom."

The haunted eyes of the prisoner lived for an instant in the white fire of the gem; then they closed. "Father," said the gaoler to the priest, "he is dead. The good news has killed him. It will be a sorry task for you to return the ring to our lord Bishop; but I pray you mention I laid no hand on him—once I heard you were coming with his pardon."

"The ring?" The priest's fingers closed on it. "Perhaps my lord Bishop expects it back. They call this stone the 'Death Diamond.' Perhaps my lord Bishop knew that, after twelve long years, good news would not be good for this sorry son of Mother Church."

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

**WHEN!**

When Millionaires and Kings  
 And other funny things  
 Such as Earls and Dukes and Duchesses galore,  
 Consent to cast their riches  
 Down the drains and in the ditches  
 And live in horrid hovels like the poor.  
 When the Profiteers and Bankers  
 And other social cankers,  
 Monopolists and Money-Grubbers pour  
 Their ill-gotten gains down gutters  
 And forgo their little "flutters"  
 So cleverly kept just within the Law.  
 When Archbishops and the Pope  
 Pack up selling us their dope  
 And leave their palaces for evermore;  
 When they shed their costly raiment  
 And for blessings take no payment  
 And the Church gives up her millions by the score.  
 (Do they think we do not rumble  
 When they tell us to be humble  
 While their regal robes are trailing on the floor?);  
 Just by way of an example  
 Their own teachings they should sample—  
 They'd look dandy dressed like Gandhi in the raw!  
 When they cease to fawn and flatter  
 That their bellies may grow fatter  
 And remember what the Bible said of yore—  
 It's far easier to wheedle  
 A camel through a needle  
 Than to smuggle one rich man through heaven's door!

When all people shall be free  
 From religious bigotry  
 And never more shall fear another War;  
 When there's fair return for labour  
 And Man truly loves his neighbour—  
 Then I'll put away my pen—but not before!

W. H. WOOD.

**RELIGION IS FRENZY**

JUDGE RUTHERFORD preached in the Albert Hall, millions now living will never die. Since then, we have had a world war, a possibility of starvation, and the Atomic Bomb. Pastor Russell taught us that the end of the world would be in the year 1914, that Jesus the Prince of Peace returned to this earth in 1874 and set up an unseen Kingdom, and took complete control of all human affairs. Thousands sold up their homes, filled their larders with food for their children, as they (so-called Saints) would be taken up into Heaven to be for ever with their Lord.

I was one of these poor dupes, but am still here, having survived the blitz, the flu, the lack of good food, and so far as I can see, no Prince of Peace is in the air, and if He is, then He is a hopeless failure, as we have had the most terrible times on earth since His arrival.

I understand that the self-styled Judge Rutherford built a great mansion for the benefit of Moses who would be here, straight from the grave in 1917, filled this mansion with beautiful furniture, and surrounded it with lovely trees. For a while, I believe he lived in this mansion, awaiting a knock on the front door from Moses.

Years passed, nothing happened, until one day a sprightly young Jew did knock at the door and declared he was Moses. He was quickly seen off the doorstep, and nothing has been heard of him since.

I beg of all Christians to sincerely check-up on what they believe and what they think, as I was once a sincere follower of both Russell and Rutherford. I am now a converted Christian, a 100 per cent. Atheist, a sound thinking man, as happy as the day is long.

I blame my parents for having started me on the road to believing in all kinds of myths; I was easy prey for them all. I hope the rising generations will be spared the humility I have endured, when I boldly declared to my children that I had been thinking wrongly for over 40 years, and had during this time destroyed all the reasoning part of their minds, the only part that placed them on a higher level to the most intelligent animal ever created. My son, age 21, immediately shook me by the hand and said: "Pop, I am now proud to have you as my father, I knew you were off the rails years ago."

J. A. FREEMAN.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

Sir,—The enclosed copy of a letter sent with my renewal of my wireless licence may interest readers:—

"To the District Postmaster, N.W. 1.

Enclosed please find cheque value 10s. for the renewal of my Wireless Licence, P.O. 1374. I know your efforts are employed to obtain payment for a service which on the whole is good and reasonable in cost. I wish, however, to raise a useless protest at the continuing use of the 7-55 a.m. item euphemistically called 'Lift up your Heart.' It lacks serious thought, and is not even a semi-comic turn. My doctor tells me it is a dangerous practice to 'Lift up your Heart.' It may be these ill-effects are really the intention of the B.B.C. religious Gestapo. If this item must be inflicted on an erstwhile public, I make the suggestion that same should precede 'physical jerks' just after the news at 7 a.m. It would give a feeling of retaliation to many and would not obtrude on the day for a goodly number of the intelligent section of listeners."

JOSEPH H. DEACON.

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.**

**LONDON—OUTDOOR**

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Messrs WOOD, HART, and PAGE.

**LONDON—INDOOR**

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., a lecture.

**COUNTRY—OUTDOOR**

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, at 3 p.m. and 6.20 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

**COUNTRY—INDOOR**

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (173, Church Street).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m.: "Crimes of Christianity"—Christ to Constantine, Part II.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Miss MARCIA BURNS: "Soviet Wife and Mother."

Failsworth Secular School.—Sunday, afternoon, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: "Science or Religion?" Evening, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: "Can Christianity Survive in Socialism?"

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: "God and the Atomic Bomb."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. F. A. RIDLEY: "Japanese Shintoism. The Invention of a New Religion."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, Manchester).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. FRANCIS J. CORINA (Bradford): "Secularism or Christianity?"

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