

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On Freedom

WHAT is meant by liberty of thought? It of course involves the right to think. But if it ends there it is of small value, at any rate, the prohibition of mere thinking can only cripple thought, it cannot prevent it. Freedom of thought must involve the right to speak, for without it thought becomes wild and irresponsible. To-day freedom of secular thought is fairly advanced. It is admitted in theory, although it is still checked in fact. But there is a good sign in the fact that in social matters repression of thought is practised in a more or less shamefaced way. In the field of religion free thought is still obstructed, and in some countries is openly forbidden. In our own country it is theoretically free, but it is denied in practice, with the result that humbug and lying are still more active in connection with religion than with any other subject.

We were reminded of this when listening to one of the B.B.C. semi-religious lectures and heard the speaker announce that religious freedom is a product of Christianity. Where religion is concerned the B.B.C. is never particular about the truth; and the truth here is that there is no instance on record where Christian bodies have possessed the power to deny freedom of speech and publication and have refrained from doing so. The great Spurgeon put the matter in a nutshell when he said that their sect was the only one that had never persecuted, and added that they had never done so because they had never been strong enough.

What is meant, or what should be meant, by "religious freedom"? Presumably it should mean complete freedom openly to accept or reject any form of religion, or to attack religion in any or all of its forms. But at most what the average Christian—particularly those in high places—means by freedom of religion is permission to make a choice from a cluster of superstitions. One must not attack. It is held that if he has not the faith to accept he should at least have the decency to be silent. It was Lord Chesterfield who said that his religion was the religion of all sensible men, and when asked what that religion was, replied that sensible men never tell. The only freedom that will satisfy a Freethinker will be liberty to believe, liberty to reject, and liberty to attack. The latter should be more than a mere liberty, it should be a self-imposed duty.

Against this there is the whole history of religion, or one may say almost the whole history of humanity. Among primitive peoples the idea of rejecting gods simply does not exist. Life is collective in form, and the collectivity extends to the gods. To offend them is not so much an intellectual blunder as it is disloyalty to the whole of the tribe. The whole story of religious persecution is wrapped

in that sentence. The heretic is a traitor to his people. To tolerate him is an offence to God. It is to this that we owe the intense hatred of the believers in the heretic.

Among primitive peoples this form of elimination of the heretic probably does produce a very serious effect. Walter Bagehot pointed out many years ago that with primitive peoples the fear of the tribal gods may have served to hold together the members of a tribe. Whatever may be the value of that suggestion, the fact is that with a more advanced tribal life the fear of offending the gods acts as a serious drag on further development. In all stages of culture suppression of freedom chiefly affects the better type of character. Blasphemy laws, whether in a primitive or an advanced community, do not affect the thoughtless or the vicious. It is always upon the better type that blasphemy laws—ancient or modern—fall. The fool, the liar, the coward, go on their way unaffected by the better types of character. In practice the overlordship of religious ideas does not seriously disturb those who place personal safety as above all other considerations. At their best, new ideas are adopted only after delay and struggle, and then in a form that robs them of much of their value. We might have had the evolutionary concept in full operation a century earlier but for the opposition of the Christian Churches.

On the whole, we may say with unquestionable truth that there is no instance known of a community that was uniformly religious and at the same time tolerant of religious differences. Sects may consent to religious freedom, but none of them desire it; and I know of none that, with the power to persecute, have refrained from doing so. The Protestant Reformation is a case in point. It is often said that this movement was an expression of religious freedom. This, however, is very far from the truth. The true significance of the movement of which Protestantism was a quasi-expression, was not religious, but social and intellectual. Socially, the vital question was whether the governing force in society was to be secular or religious. The whole social benefit of the Protestant movement was not the establishing of a new religious movement, but the lessening of the power of the Christian religion.

On the intellectual side we have to count a series of forces, none of which were religious, and all of which made for a weakening of religion. The revival of letters, the growth of new conceptions in astronomy, in geography, and in physics, the rediscovery of the almost forgotten culture of antiquity, set in motion forces that made directly for the disintegration of religious beliefs. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were notoriously eras of a very widespread scepticism in religion; even some of the Popes did not escape suspicion. And while much is known, one may safely assume that a much larger amount of scepticism existed unexpressed and undiscovered. In the main, then,

Protestantism represented the influence of this general spirit of unrest in the domain of religion. People did not become more religiously tolerant because they believed more fervently, but because the value of religion was declining in view of the numerous other interests that had been evoked. Those who were genuinely and intensely religious were not more tolerant of differences; but the very multiplication of sects, and the fact of these sects fighting against the supremacy of a single Church, familiarised the public mind with religious differences. Religious freedom was thus not a consequence of Protestantism; it was, at most, an accompaniment, and to all the leaders a very unwelcome one.

In both these directions—the social and the intellectual—the fact really governing the growth of religious freedom has been the realisation of the comparative unimportance of religious belief. At the beginning, as I have said, religion starts as a social force, and a social force of the first importance. Religion is the business of the whole community. It is everybody's business to see that everyone else believes rightly, because to offend the gods is to endanger the welfare of the tribe. At the other extreme we have the conviction that each man's religious belief is his own business, and that, right or wrong, religious belief is a matter that concerns himself alone. But between these two extremes there lies an enormous development. And the last position can only be reached when it is recognised that, so far as the State is concerned, so far as man's social duties and obligations are concerned, these can be completely and satisfactorily discharged without necessary reference to religious belief at any point. Religious freedom would be impossible in any community that sincerely believed right religious belief to be essential to the satisfactory discharge of social duties. So long as that is believed, so long the coercion of opinion remains certain. It becomes an act of social purification and of social protection. The community which says that men may adopt any religion they please, or, if they prefer it, go without religion altogether, is saying by that, so far as the State is concerned, religious belief is of little or no consequence. The measure of religious freedom is thus the measure of religious indifference.

Again on the intellectual side the same thing appears. In the first place, it may be noted that belief in religion stands on quite a different basis to belief in any scientific subject. If I do not, for example, believe in the law of gravitation, it makes no difference to anyone else, or to the fact itself. If it is a truth, I cannot ignore it in fact, however I may do so in theory. A scientific formula is based upon verifiable facts, and these sooner or later make themselves felt. There is thus, on the scientific side, no necessary tendency to coercion. The problem of the scientific teacher is simply to state the facts, and leave them to work conviction. With the religious teacher, on the other hand, belief is everything. In fact, where religion is concerned, belief provides the facts. If I do not believe in a god or a soul, then to me neither exists. Before I can be influenced by God I must believe in him. I do not believe in him because of his influence, I am influenced because I believe. The consequence of this is that the religious teacher everywhere builds upon accepted data which are quite independent of verification. He can never say with the scientist, "Here are the facts. I must leave you to examine them and form

your own conclusion." He says, in fact, "Here are certain beliefs. The more carefully you examine them the less likely are you to believe in them. The longer you are without them the less likely are you to need them."

It is, then, absurd to speak of freedom leading to increased religion. The world is not more religious than it was; non-religion is stronger to-day than it ever was. The factors that make for religious freedom are, first, the multiplication of religious sects—itsself an expression of heresy—second, the development of social life, which liberates social forces from the power of religious ideas, and third, the growth of verifiable knowledge which, by offering a scientific explanation of one group of phenomena after another, leaves religion without any clear utility to the mental life of man. Freedom of religion and indifference to religion are two aspects of the same fact.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

MALINOWSKI'S LAST MESSAGE

PROFESSOR BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI first saw the light in Cracow in 1884 and died prematurely in 1942. This celebrated anthropologist was a firm Freethinker whose first-hand studies of primitive peoples in their native habitat are essential to every serious student of savage life and mind.

The posthumous series of essays before us is entitled "A Scientific Theory of Culture" (The University of North Carolina Press, 1944). In his excellent preface to this volume Huntingdon Cairns notes that Malinowski "was convinced that cultural phenomena were not the consequence of capricious inventiveness or simple borrowing, but were determined by basic needs and the possibilities of satisfying them."

In other words, Malinowski considered the common requirements of everyday life—physiological, economic, emotional and environmental—as the main determinants of every type of culture prevalent in savage, barbaric or even so-called civilised society, whether past or present.

The opening essays in this remarkably suggestive work cover an extensive field and the later exposition of the Functional Theory of Culture is intensely stimulating. Still, the entire study is decidedly controversial, and several of the views expressed run counter to those of some of the most eminent authorities on the science of man.

Less debatable, however, is Malinowski's critical survey of the special theories advanced by the late Sir James Frazer in his multitudinous publications.

Personally acquainted with Frazer for the last thirty years of his life, Malinowski's impressions of his friend are interesting and revealing. He found him a diffident and unassuming scholar with a pronounced dislike for publicity. Lady Frazer, however, proved far more responsive to outside attractions and her influence over her modest husband was very great indeed. "Those of us," avers Malinowski, "who came to know the capable, energetic, though somewhat redoubtable life companion of Frazer became as devoted to her as to him. Orders, titles, and honorary degrees, apart, she also co-operated with him, had his books translated and managed for him his extensive correspondence and his relations with other scholars."

Although Frazer's influence in scientific circles was profound Malinowski states that he was a poor controversialist. Only occasionally did he improvise in conversation stately passages, so many of which are scattered in his published writings. Yet his eager interest in everything connected with his studies was intense, as his correspondence, which inspired so many students amply proves. As Malinowski testifies: "The

letters which I received from Frazer during my sojourns in New Guinea and Melanesia helped me more by suggestion, query and comment than any other influence."

Frazer disdained psycho-analysis so greatly that he declined the perusal of its publications, or even to discuss its claims. He studiously avoided discussion of its merits both in public and private. He was so disconcerted by Andrew Lang's characteristically perverse review of "The Golden Bough" that he discontinued his researches for some months and afterwards made it a rule never to read carping criticisms or reviews of his writings.

That Frazer immensely influenced his contemporaries and successors is undeniable. Malinowski cites a long list of those, both in Britain and abroad, who have profited by, and developed his discoveries. Among these recipients Malinowski includes Anatole France, Bergson, Arnold Toynbee and even Spengler. Our author discerns one secret of Frazer's success in his ability to convert dry-as-dust writing into descriptive matter providing real pleasure. More imaginative than analytical, Frazer's works are all masterpieces of literary grace. As Malinowski says: "The long litanies of ethnographic data bore us to extinction in most writings of the classical, evolutionary and comparative school. Transfigured by Frazer, they make 'The Golden Bough' alive and vivid, 'Totemism and Exogamy' interesting and instructive, and 'Folk Lore in the Old Testament' an anthropological saga."

While dissenting from some of Frazer's contentions such as magic's precedence to religion, Malinowski admits that when reviewing the phenomena of savage societies, Frazer is a completely reliable guide. To his friendly critic he is a splendid explorer whose records do not always support his theories. As Malinowski observes: "Frazer's insight in linking up ritual with the practical activities of food production tells us in so many words that religious and magical belief has always functioned as a principle of order, of integration, and of organisation at all primitive and at higher levels of human development." As Malinowski reads the evidence, the chief magician or priestly king being the leader in primitive life, this makes him regarded as the most potent controller of those climatic influences which affect agriculture, as well as those mysterious forces which favour or retard animal procreation.

Malinowski opines that Frazer's "Totemism and Exogamy" is even a better work than his magnum opus—"The Golden Bough"—for the budding student of anthropological lore as, until the recent publication of Murdock's "Our Primitive Contemporaries," it furnished "an easier, more attractive and a better integrated picture of a whole series of tribal cultures than any book I know."

Our author contends that the magic art was never disassociated from religion and could never have preceded it. Those forces of Nature only that were beyond human control were deemed responsive to the sorcerer's art. Magic, as conceived by primitive man, did not and does not apply to the world as a whole. As his writings clearly show, Frazer was fully conscious of this truth. As Malinowski cogently asserts: "Study the organisation of Australians, Indians, or Polynesians, and you will see that their customs and principles of kinship and chieftainship are effective, that is, rational. You will find magic and religion occurring only with reference to such events as rain and sunshine, the hunter's luck and the fisherman's chance."

Again, when man feels himself impotent, he prays to and petitions his gods. Obviously if the savage were irrational he would starve to death and the fact of his survival proves that he responds rationally to his surroundings.

Native races naturally possess no real insight into the conditions which promote health or engender disease. And it is recognised that the superstition that human malice occasions illness or death gave rise to the world-wide belief in witchcraft and sorcery. So a friendly magician is called upon to dispel the

evil inflicted by a malevolent medicine man. It seems that with the uncivilised, as with ourselves, where knowledge ends religion or its equivalent begins.

Other theories entertained by Frazer Malinowski submits to criticism, but there is no unanimity of opinion among experts concerning the issues involved. In his final essay "Whither Anthropology?" Malinowski argues that despite Frazer's many permanent contributions to the science, several of his conclusions seem unsound. Nevertheless, Frazer's critic allows that: "The long road that starts in the woods of Nemi and leads us through primeval jungle, desert, swamp, South Sea Island, the steppes of Asia and the prairies of America, into a gradual understanding of the human heart and the human mind is perhaps the greatest scientific Odyssey in modern humanism. We learn there at first hand to appreciate the behaviour of primitive magicians, chiefs and kings. We become steeped in the live practices of savages at war and at work, in their marriage customs, the fears and hopes related to their taboos, to their tribal dances and their military enterprises."

Moreover, Malinowski admits that Frazer's main teachings and methods are impregnable. It is only in interpretation that this distinguished anthropologist is open to criticism. Also, we gather that "Frazer's psychological interest appears to us sounder than it seemed to be a quarter of a century ago."

It is certain that Frazer was a splendid humanist. He combined a lingering love for ancient traditions and the past's archaic, if ruined structures, while he treasured the ascending stages of human progress in times remote with an affectionate appreciation of modern mental, moral and social development towards the establishment of equity and non-aggression, should these desiderata become possible, among men.

T. F. PALMER.

AT THE ZOO

Mr. Pinkle of Palmer's Green,
Garbed in galoshes and gaberdine,
Visited the Zoo one day.
He sat for ages outside cages,
Witnessing through all its stages
The prisoned life of beasts of prey.

The Wombats thrilled him; Wild Cats filled him
With a fearful trepidation;
But he felt no shame until he came
Upon his ancestral relation.
As he paused to gape at the hairy Ape
He was torn with agitation—
"If I'm cousin to that, I'll eat my hat!"
He cried with indignation.

Thought the Ape, with a frown, as he looked down
Where puny Pinkle sat—
"There's been a bungle in the jungle
If I'm related to that!"

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

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ACID DROPS

A special article in the "Record"—one of the oldest of our existing religious newspapers—had the other day a leading article with the title of "Thinking Ahead." We cannot think of any topic which an intelligent Christian would talk about or think about with less gratification. For it is becoming plain that the future of Christianity—real Christianity—lies behind. Before the court of common sense he can hope only that he will be dismissed on a promise to behave better in the future than he has in the past. Yet hope dies slowly and tremendous efforts are being made in all directions to regain by hook or by crook—mostly by crook—for the Church some of its early power and glory and some of its earlier greatness. But it is too late. There is not one of the fundamental features of Christianity that is not discredited by modern thought, and many of them are discarded altogether. Jesus Christ who commenced his career as a God has become a Socialist with a friendly interest in social and ethical matters. Salvation by faith has given way to plans for better houses and larger allowances for the old and the infirm. The Jesus myth is approaching its end.

There seems to be some sort of a discussion going on as to whether the Emperor of Japan is a Christian. Of course the idea is absurd, or we might say that the Emperor became a God by the same process which transformed our king into an incarnate God by the Westminster Cathedral magic. And truth to tell there is nothing new to commit brutalities in the course of war with the sanction of God. It is not peculiar to either Germany or Japan. Nor is a delight in torture a monopoly foreign to Christian peoples. It is true that in those days when religion counted for something torture was in full play. It is also true that there were no atomic bombs in those days—which seems to have frightened so many into becoming advocates of peace. But the medieval Church did its best, and in the castle of Nuremberg there is still to be seen some of the weapons with which the Christians of medieval days drove home their devotion to God. We must give the medieval Church its dues, and trust they have reaped their reward.

If there were fewer fools in the world there would be fewer others who seem to delight in catering for them. That sounds like an aphorism, but it is the only explanation we can find for the publication of an article which appeared in the "Sunday Express" for October 14. It is written by Sir Angus Watson. We know nothing of that gentleman so we must treat him as writing quite seriously on the way God intervened in the war and does intervene on other occasions. Of course, Sir Angus may have been merely pulling legs. But an example of God's interference is found in Anthony Eden saying after Dunkirk: "We lost nearly all our guns and armour; there is not a single division equipped in this country." We quite fail to recognise the hand of God in this—although Hitler did. Of course, God may have only just heard about the war and did his best in the circumstances. There is also a quotation of Walter Lippman which runs:—

"Never before have we had to rely so completely on ourselves. No guardian to think for us, no precedent to follow without question, no lawmaker above, only ordinary men and women set to deal with heart-breaking perplexity. All weakness comes to the surface. We are homeless in a jungle of machines and untamed powers that haunt and lure the imagination."

Many of his fellow world citizens believe this to be true, and look out on life's tragedy in a mood of bleak despair.

The bearing of this on God's help is rather vague. Lippman is generally said to be a Freethinker—certainly his "Preface to Morals" bears out that opinion. Anthony Eden seems to be saying only that the condition of things was very bad. What God did at Dunkirk was just nothing. The "common" people were far better as helpers for our soldiers.

Sir Angus's chief rock appears to be Winston Churchill. We have not read the book of Churchill's which he cites, and it was evidently written when he was young, and whether he was "trying his hand" or "poking fun," we know not. But according to Sir Angus when, during the South African war a Boer arrested him and refrained from shooting him, it was God's intervention. Then he was guided "by the hand of providence" to an English miner's home. Then God followed him to Scotland—perhaps to keep him out of mischief—and when he went to bed he saw a bible that was lying on the dressing table and of course opened it, and (again, of course) found a lengthy passage that proved God thought he was indispensable. The assumption is ours.

But even Sir Angus Watson cannot blink the fact that God does not always help where he might or where he ought. So he winds up a magnificent mess of clotted bosh that God will help us "if we will allow him to do so." And emphasises his foolishness by saying as a last word "finally His ways are vindicated and his purpose fulfilled." So the conclusion is that God will if he can, but will do it even when he can't.

Everybody has read about and admired the courage and resource of the French Resistance Movement, the Maquis, who did so much to make the lives of the German troops in France hell. No one need be surprised, therefore, that a Catholic journalist, Douglas Newton, has discovered that the wives of the Maquis were child's play in comparison with the way in which priests in Queen Elizabeth's day harassed and bamboozled the stupid Protestant population. It won't be long either before we shall be told that just as Catholics in the past were the greatest generals and admirals, so in this war it was the Catholic generals and admirals and air marshals, all holding either Rosaries or beads or a rabbit foot tightly to their bosoms, who won all the great victories. Though it is true that these Catholic journalists never now mention Petain, Gamelin or Weygand—so very different from 1939-40.

One thousand five hundred delegates to the Confederation of French Catholic workers have refused to be allied to the General Confederation of Labour—who comprise mostly Syndicalists, Communists and Socialists. They want to have nothing to do with politics—that is, they refuse to discuss the aims of the other workers who want political action, women in industry, and freedom of education. We are not told what they want instead—perhaps the counting of beads, the worship of relics, and full holiday and pay on Saint Days.

The Church Assembly has now published the final report of its Financial Commission, and it will prove very sad reading for good Churchmen. The money question has always loomed large in the Church, for, apart from its ownership of land, coalmines, etc., it is the people who have to keep the Church going with their contributions, and the Commission insist that the various dioceses "should assume the main responsibility for financing Church work"—a suggestion which may or may not be received with delight. One grave warning is made against "the unlimited appeals for large sums of money," the reason given being that "the ordinary parishioner will have to be seriously convinced of the claims of religion for financial support." Does this mean that the "ordinary parishioner" is beginning to smell a rat?

We speak with all due deference, bearing in mind the trifling fact that we know very little about the nature or quality of the atomic bomb. But we do feel that there is a lot of nonsense filling the air about it. And the greatest piece of humbug, or ignorance, or both, is the public statement that America intends to keep the "secret" of the bomb to itself. So far as we can gather, there is really very little to learn concerning the quality of the bomb. It is admitted that Germany was very busy discovering the secret, Russia has also been working, and English scientists worked with the Americans. We are left wondering who it is who really believes the "bomb" can be kept as a national secret?

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.

Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

"FREETHINKING FATHER."—Will appear next week. Crowded out.

G. H. LEATE.—We have read what you say with interest. We are a long way off from securing a genuine recognition of fair play where religion is concerned.

P. WATERMAN.—We shall reprint the edition of "The Age of Reason" as early as possible. It is entirely a question of paper.

G. BELL.—Will appear as early as possible.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, 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 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

In spite of the very bad weather last Sunday there was a good audience at the Stratford Town Hall. The lecture was followed with the kind of interest that a speaker would wish for, and the questions were quite to the point, which gave Mr. Cohen an opportunity which he handled with his usual skill. The chair was taken by Mrs. Venton who presided over the meeting in a first-class manner.

Will branches of the N.S.S. who wish particulars of meetings, etc., to appear in our Lecture Notices please see that they are sent to reach us by first post on the Saturday preceding the next issue of the paper.

"The Lamp of the World" is a Roman Catholic book we have not seen, but we gather from "The Universe" that it is "a book of instruction for Catholic teachers." One item of information is that "The vast majority of men of all ages and nations are in hell." But we understand that while it would appear to be a rather uncomfortable place with regard to climate, it still remains miles and miles in front for company.

Sussex seems in a very doleful state. It has plenty of churches, also parsons, and the diocese is old enough to have established an adequate body of worshippers and cash. But, alas, it seems to be in need of both, and recently there was a "beat up" of laymen and preachers headed by laymen and clerics to secure more worshippers and, particularly, more cash. Actually more attendants than cash is needed. This is not because money is not required, but because those who are ready to pay heavily will pay up only if more people show themselves interested in the Church.

But that is precisely the point at which the Church breaks down, and there are two obvious causes. One is the growth of a better understanding of religious doctrines. The other is that those who need financial help are now getting it as part of the duty of the State as a whole. They need not crawl to church to share in the charities that exist. Jesus is reported to have said: "The poor you have always with you," and so long as that remains true the Churches will be safe. The poor must be kept in order, and the Church helps by way of charities. The outlook for the churches is black.

There is one other factor operating against religion which must have considerable weight against the Churches, and religion that is not usually stressed. Evil living was once upon a time the most popular charge against Atheism. There are survivals of this even to-day, but it was only really effective when the publicly-avowed Atheists were comparatively few.

Slanderous tales about the social criminality of unbelievers were then enough for timid and ignorant believers to dread an Atheist as one might fear a deadly disease. But to-day, unbelievers are common. The general public know them and have lost all fear of them. They accept the idea first, that every man has the right to at least reject religion if he pleases to. Religion from being accepted as unmistakably true is admitted by millions to be a matter of opinion. All sorts of opinions are expressed, and as Bagehot said many years ago discussion implies the possibility of one side at least, may be wrong. To-day, Atheism may not be common—so far as open expression is concerned. And that is all that any Atheist demands. The right to form and express one's own opinions. Given that in full measure and religion is doomed.

At Birmingham to-day Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture for the local N.S.S. branch. The meeting will be held at 38, John Bright Street at 3.30 p.m., and the subject "God and the Atomic Bomb" is attractive. The branch has a very hard-working secretary and he and it should receive all the support that the local saints can give.

A branch of the N.S.S. in the Harrow, Middlesex district, was in course of formation when the acting secretary received his calling-up papers for the Forces. Will anyone willing to carry on from where he had to leave off communicate with the General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

The Belfast Secular Society is doing some good work and making headway. To-day, Mr. J. T. Brighton will be the speaker in the Londonderry Room, Grand Central Hotel, Belfast, and his subject is "Is Sunday Sacred?" Unfortunately the time of the lecture was omitted from the details we received, but previous meetings have been at 7 p.m. We wish both the speaker and the Belfast Secular Society a highly successful meeting, and feel sure Mr. Brighton's address and personality will be appreciated by an Irish audience. Admission is free, with questions and discussion after the lecture.

GOD, GOD, AND EDUCATION

THE introduction in 1870 of public "education" in this country coincided roughly with that period when the evolutionary view of life was being established among knowledgeable people as a newer and more accurate mode of thought. Certainly there was a strong heretical flavour about the acceptance of the evolutionary idea, but among those who fought in the battle of ideas of those days there was, it seems to me, a greater disposition to adopt frankly and courageously the anti-theological position which was essentially bound up with the new teachings of science. The delicate art of intellectual humbug had not been brought to the state of perfection that it seems to occupy to-day in that section of society which really knows better than to believe in the gods, yet lacks the courage to say so. But that is another question.

Darwin and his contemporaries in evolutionary investigation did not simply wield an axe against the tree of theological belief—they drove a bulldozer which split the trunk from top to bottom and made the very roots groan under the strain, so that the religious sap began to fall, and has never risen since. But the roots were too well embedded in the soil of religious institutionalism for a complete uprooting to be effected. The churches, shaken and unnerved, braced up their tottering tree trunk with cables of cant and convention, and have been pulling the wires ever since.

This institutional wire-pulling prevented the greatest alliance that ever offered itself for the cultural and social development

of a nation—the alliance of the new evolutionary outlook with the newly introduced system of public education. Who knows how much has been lost in human development, or at least retarded, by the failure to co-ordinate the rapidly growing knowledge of the nineteenth century and onwards with the new vehicle that had been shaped ostensibly for spreading knowledge?

But it was not to be. The new knowledge and the new outlook were not to be offered to the people, but were for the benefit of those privileged classes in our community for whom many things are good, but to whom the same things may be bad for the ordinary people. So, while the privileged extended their privileges, the ordinary people and their children had to be content, even with the coming of public education, with "learning" based upon those primitive religious notions which are only to be found on the mental garbage heaps of really intelligent people.

The Dope Shops of the ignorant—the churches—were permitted to continue supplying the prescription "as before," only more so, for they had added the new schools to their spheres of influence. Public education, poisoned at its source by the corrupting element of religion (which is the very opposite of knowledge and learning) and restricted in scope by the determination of both Church and State that the people's children should only learn that which would make them better "workers," was doomed from the start as a means of developing vigorous and intelligent individuals. Rather did it become a huge mould for producing patterned people who would fit in with the scheme of things arranged for them by their betters, the priests and politicians.

It is true that some unofficial bodies have, concurrently with public education, done a good deal of work with the aim of broadening education, but these bodies have also suffered from those diseases of religion which prevented their work from being wholly useful—the diseases of cant, hypocrisy, humbug, timidity, and playing up to the religious interests in the futile hope that something good might come from that source if it could be usefully "reformed." When told by Freethinkers that it was a forlorn hope, they usually replied by making the asinine assertion that to attack religion was flogging a dead horse, anyhow.

If I may recast and mix the metaphor, it is they who have missed the bus and are barking up the wrong tree, for until the ignorant religious habit of believing without evidence is eliminated from public education there can be but slow progress towards rational thinking in any form of education, adult or otherwise. The foundation is bad, for in the schools it is one of the very first jobs with our infant children to instil the "belief" characteristics of Christianity. That is done before any secular form of teaching is given to infants; and the same principle applies all through the schooling period, for every school day begins with lessons in "belief."

In other words, the school-life history of every child is one in which "belief" (upon authority, and without question) is drummed into it before it ever starts to learn, while the daily curriculum follows the same abbreviated process when learning has actually begun.

While others have played with superficialities, however, the Freethought movement has consistently tackled the prime obstacle in the way of education by attacking the "belief" method from every angle, and by exposing the untruths which children are taught to believe. To attempt to teach even simple scientific truths, or to hope to develop a scientific approach to life, while prefacing one's efforts with Christian beliefs, is like trying to fit new dentures without extracting the decayed teeth. So, concurrently with public education, the Freethought movement has been pulling the teeth, doing the difficult and dirty work, the work which hurts most, and brings the least appreciation from the patient. This in order that others might not waste all their energies fruitlessly fashioning dentures which

could never fit the intended wearers. Many in education have resented the work of the Freethought movement, being themselves victims of the same habit of belief which they are passing on to our youngsters; but many have also watched the work with a feeling of appreciation and satisfaction, unable to help lest they should become victims of God's Gestapo, but nevertheless glad to welcome Freethought propaganda in publications, in halls, at street corners, and elsewhere, because it prevented some of their own teaching from falling on stony ground.

Just as the work of Freethought is recognised and welcomed by friends, so is it recognised and hated by enemies who have been at great pains to stop its progress. This has been attempted in two ways. Blatantly, on the one hand, by the increase of religious instruction in our schools under the new Education Act, for the first time in the history of public education; and on the other hand subtly, by cleverly designed syllabuses of religious instruction drawn up as a guide for teachers, syllabuses in which even the evolutionary outlook is now dealt with and obscured by a religious veneer. I have seen several of these syllabuses, and they are cunning things indeed. So cunning that they may tend to produce in our schools a new type of boy and girl, best described as intelligent half-wits—intelligent enough in a general way, but half-witted in their attitude to the metaphysical mumbo-jumbo that is designed to dull their intellects.

To meet the new strategy of religion in our schools we shall need new tactics in the future. The impact of the Freethought point of view must be intensified upon the young people themselves. The growth of scientific and technical teaching in the schools during the next few years will necessarily be rapid. The new techniques of commerce and industry make this inevitable if workers are to be produced capable of fitting into the modern social system. But it seems to be hoped that the strengthening of the religious features of school life will counter-balance any tendency this increase of science may produce to send young people in the "wrong direction." It is only scientific workers that are wanted, not scientific thinkers.

So it becomes the business of Freethought to cash in on the newer requirements of education by teaching the youngsters to think scientifically as well as to work scientifically. Over and above the specialisation which will be a feature of the education system in the future (tending to produce one-track experts whose skill in one direction may be equalled by their stupidity in other directions) there will be needed a broader grounding in the general aspects of scientific thought—the materialist point of view—and the "humanities." Already there are clear instances of the intention to encourage specialism at the expense of intellectualism, notably in the reservation of specialist students at the universities and other establishments, but the calling up for military service of those whose studies tend more to "dangerous" intellectualism.

The position seems clear to me—in the "compartment" type of mind there is a corner for God, and, with God to work on, the priests and politicians too often get their way. To keep God out is the Freethought task, and in modern education our work lies at every door, from the infant school to the university.

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

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THE RELIGIOUS APPARITION

WE are now equipped with a synthesis of knowledge applicable to all human conduct. Science has searched, science is searching; science has known, science knows. The practical philosopher's dream has been realised. Though the two stones and the ultimate reality of all things have yet to be conceived.

Einstein's universe, I read, "takes form as a huge Cosmic Sphere to circuit which would take light, travelling at 186,284 miles per second, 18,000 million years. Its circumference is thus 118,000 trillion miles, its diameter 40,000 trillion miles, and its volume 23 million decillion cubic miles." Nevertheless, we must agree with the above writer when he concludes that nothing as yet has shaken his belief in the universe as infinitely extended.

As regards overpopulated districts, in existence there are at least 60 stars for every earthly inhabitant. So here once more somebody says, the more we know of the cosmos, the more we realise the inscrutable mystery its galaxies of "universal-multiverses" will always be to us. Yet knowledge can have a more practical utility apart from universes and mathematicians. In the words of Prof. Huxley: "God the Ruler is being forced farther and farther away from contact with the practical affairs of the world into a shadowy background existence, like the vestigial smile of a disappearing Cheshire Cat, and perhaps eventually over the edge of the Cosmic stage."

Then referring to Spencer, we hear such primary truths as "The Indestructibility of Matter," "The Continuity of Motion," "The Persistence of Force," and not to mention Evolution, that implacable sponsor of metamorphosis which works causes and effects throughout the Cosmos, all explained and proved.

Then, pretending ourselves to be sensitive to the undulations of molecules, we enter the atomic regions. Here, amongst infinitesimal solar systems we find a world of orderly chaos. Here, amongst concrete aggregates, we are able to watch the process of evolution in detail. With fantastic hurry-scurry we see electrons breaking up atoms and forming atoms composing various compounds. Yet above all we should keep Spencer in mind when he spoke of the evolution of an aggregate as being comprised of its journey from the imperceptible to the perceptible and from the perceptible back again into the imperceptible. The first being a process of evolution, that is, the "integration of matter and the dissipation of motion," and the second, (from the perceptible back into the imperceptible) dissolution, "the absorption of motion and disintegration of matter."

Yet above all these truisms, staring us in the face there is something ludicrous to a point of fantastical absurdity. It is a man; a little man with a round white collar. Hark! and hear what he says:—

... and all was joy until Eve plucked the fruit from the tree of knowledge. After that, all mankind were cursed for many years. Then God, having pity on the human race, sent down to die on the cross, that the world might be saved, his only begotten son; believe in him—and ye will be saved."

S. WOLF.

CORRESPONDENCE

WORLD DEMOCRACY.

Sir.—All interested in World Democracy are much concerned with the way things are going against a Free Democratic Election in Greece. The Regent, Bishop Damaskinos, is a man or a Bishop of great Spiritual Power and he has used that Power for all sorts of Governments; so why not for a Democratic one? Mr. Papworth, of the T.U.C., went out and did good work; but things have gone worse again. I fear he has no Spiritual Power. There isn't much time.

Now, Mr. Hannan Swaffer, the biggest Gossip Journalist ever, in Fleet Street, has just published a wonderful book of wonderful Spiritual Gossip Stories. A Labour Government is now in Power and H.S. is a Labour Gossip Journalist. Surely he could use his Spiritual Powers to influence Bishop Damaskinos in favour of Democracy. We don't expect him to get in touch with Rasputin's ghost about Russia; but surely he might get into gossip touch with Sir Basil Zaharoff and get some help—even if it were only a wink to some of his one-time co-directors who are still on the Earth Plane. This would be much more useful work than merely fiddling with Ghosts of airmen who have passed over. A successful Democratic Election in Greece through the Spiritual influence of Sir Basil's Spirit would be a great stroke for the Spirits, and it might be a good thing for Greece, in spite of the sardonic laughter from Grecian Ghosts in the Summerland. Why not?—Yours, etc., A. Z.

THE FREETHINKER'S FATE.

Sir.—I was presented recently with a pamphlet which bears the imprimatur of the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, and is entitled "The Sanity of Catholicism." This publication is replete with the usual sophistry of Jesuit teaching, which is accepted as an *auto-da-fé* (ominous phrase) by good Catholics. For the information of all the unorthodox I transcribe the following remarkable passage: "Atheism, Agnosticism and Paganism look out on life with eyes of despair. The pessimism of unbelief finds its only relief and its only logical conclusion in self-destruction." This profoundly shocking conclusion reminds me of the grim fate of the worshippers of Nicotina, as foretold in Calverley's witty poem "Tobacco," they—

Go mad and beat their wives;
Plunge (after shocking lives)
Razors and carving knives
Into their gizzards.

EDGAR SYERS.

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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. (Hydo 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. Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, October 30, 7 p.m., KINGSLEY MARTIN, M.A.: "The Conversion of England."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Londonderry Room, Grand Central Hotel, Belfast).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: "Is Sunday Sacred?"

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street).—Sunday, 3.30 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: "God and the Atomic Bomb."

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (173, Church Street).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m., "Crimes of Christianity"—Part 2: Constantine to Hypatia.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. CHARLES LESTOR: "Anthropology."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. E. REDFERN: "Education for What?"

SURVIVAL VALUE IN LITERATURE

NO fewer than four people have recently asked me a question which has probably been put to most critical writers. It is this: What books of recent years are likely to survive? In other words, as we survey the long line of English literature from Chaucer to Auden, what is likely to represent our age in the literary histories which (atom bombs permitting) will be written in fifty or a hundred years' time? This question is exceedingly difficult to answer, but I think that a brief consideration of it may have some value, since it will enable us to do something to clarify our minds and set out in due order the things we really feel about what is worth while in the art of literature.

One thing is certain. The best-sellers of our age—"Gone with the Wind," "Rebecca," "The Citadel," and the like—will have no place. The authors of these books have recently done very neat pieces of craftsmanship, but they have not produced works of art, or anything like that. They have had their reward in huge immediate sales, in film rights and stage rights and all the rest. Posterity, I am sure, will be able to dispense with them. They have no permanent value. They entertain (and they usually entertain very well) for a few hours, just as the ephemeral delights of the films entertain for a few hours; but there their usefulness is ended, their task is done. I am not accusing Mrs. Mitchell, Miss Du Maurier, and Dr. Cronin of giving a false impression of things; it so happens that their *metier* is the writing of literature which appeals to the popular taste for a brief space of time; and, while they are far better craftsmen than those now legendary best-sellers, Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, they will be mere literary curiosities in the days that lie ahead.

What, then, will survive? I am not at all sure that the more intellectually fashionable writers of our day—Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, James Joyce—will be read widely, save by specialists in the literature of the early twentieth century, though I am by no means as certain of this as I am of the fate of the dwellers in best-sellerdom. It may be that something from these writers of intellectually adult works will strike a chord in the hearts of men and women of the twenty-first century and will consequently take up the position held in our day by some parts of Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, Hardy or Meredith—not always loved but always respected as the most outstanding writers of an age which was rich in purely competent novelists and poets.

I think, however, that it is far more likely than an odd book here and there which had by the majority of people been regarded as something a little bizarre or outré, a little off the beaten track of literature, is more likely to be treasured by our successors a couple of generations hence. Prophecy is a risky profession in the best of times and the most obvious of spheres—even H. G. Wells has probably been surprised by the recent terrifying developments in the potentialities of warfare—but nowhere is it more difficult or more unpromising than in the sphere of the arts.

Still, I will risk it. First of all, then, I think that the reader of 2046 will read Herbert Read's "The Green Child," that somewhat eerie, odd romance, which I rejoice to see has recently been rescued from the out-of-print lists by the Grey Walls Press. This story, ostensibly a "straight" description of a South American revolution, must be known to the majority of readers, and it is only necessary for me to say that it is deserving of a place in all libraries, if merely because it gives a clear picture of the mind of Herbert Read—certainly one of the most unusual people now writing. Secondly, I think that I would put a fairly big bet on Arthur Machen's two brilliant autobiographical volumes, "Fay-off Things" and "Things Near and Far," being

read when many much-publicised writers of to-day have long since been forgotten. Machen has never been appreciated at his true worth. His clear and forceful prose looks easy to write; but anyone who has tried to do it will know how much labour must have gone to the making of these two books, which I think are definitely his best.

Next (though I am not at all sure if this should rank as English literature or not), I would place Kafka's "The Trial," again a book which has recently been reissued, this time by Secker and Warburg. It is also very odd, though its oddity is in some respects more clearly explained than that of the book by Herbert Read. The story of "The Trial" is that of a man facing an unknown charge in a court which he does not recognise as having any power. The atmosphere of fear and alarm holds sway throughout, and consequently the life which most of us have lived for the past two unpleasant decades is clearly indicated. This is a book which is obviously of our time and which, nevertheless, should have a message for all times.

Fourthly, I would place the only one of the more "commercial" writers in my collection of candidates, though he has been a writer who has never let commercial success be his main goal. Thomas Burke's "Living in Bloomsbury," with its delightful pictures of an intellectual world that the war seems to have swept away for ever, is a volume with which I would not willingly part. It is an autobiography of the present, which might almost be written with an eye to the future.

In verse I am not at all sure, on the other hand, that anything will survive, save a few brief lyrics by a wide variety of authors from De la Mare to Auden. We are living through an age which is not poetical. That may seem utter heresy to many readers, but, since this is a purely personal essay in prophecy, I must say what I feel to be true. I do not think that there is any poet writing to-day who can expect ever to rank with the great names of the past—and what I have already written serves to indicate that I do think that there are some prose writers who do deserve so to rank.

But I can't think of any books, apart from those which I have mentioned, which I feel will survive a century hence. I may be wrong, of course. One often is in such considerations as this. It may be that somewhere, hidden in the pages of some obscure journal, or even in manuscript awaiting discovery by some Bertram Dobell of the future, there may lie works as revealing as those of Traherne. But in this day and age I think such an event is unlikely. So many books by so many writers have been flowing freely from the presses in recent years (and this has been merely suspended, not stopped, by paper and labour shortages during the war years; it will now soon be resumed), that I do not think any really first-rate book can have escaped. I feel tolerably confident that the books which will represent the twenties, thirties, and forties of the twentieth century are in print, though they may lie unheeded and dusty on the shelves of the booksellers.

Perhaps my forecasting has been over-bold. Still, it does give a suggestion, and if everyone interested will think back over his own reading career and try to remember the half-dozen books which he considers have the greatest survival value, he may obtain a list not unlike mine.

There is only one warning with which I must conclude. Two of the books in my list—"The Green Child" and "The Trial"—have been reprinted and consequently re-read within the last few months. That may mean that they bulk over-large in my critical consciousness at this stage. If I were to re-write this essay in five years' time I might omit these two and substitute two others. I say I *might*; but I do not think that such omissions are in any way likely.

S. H.