

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXV.—No. 46

Sunday, November 18, 1945

Price Threepence

## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### With the Gods

WHEN very young I remember being puzzled by the belief that holding there was one God only should be held higher than the belief in many gods. I had then read enough to be aware that all sorts of gods existed in all sorts of places. There really seemed to be a very liberal ration of gods. But the position was puzzling. My own people believed there was only one real god, the others, they said, were "idols." But then next door were people who believed there were three gods—father, son and a fearsome "holy ghost." Then beyond these there were multitudes of gods of all sorts, colour and quality. The world seemed to me to have a god-ration that was liberal and accommodating. There were gods, little and big, good and bad. There were gods who enjoyed good wine, and others who enjoyed the savour of burning meat. There were gods white, yellow, brown and black. There seemed to be all sorts of gods for all sorts of people, and that seemed to me to be a quite sensible arrangement, particularly when I discovered that people could "swap" gods whenever they pleased. It seemed a good arrangement. In my innocence I thought the one god theory rather unfair.

I knew we were expected to praise and thank God when things were going pleasantly, but we were also expected to praise God when things went awry. If people were well they praised God for it, if they were unwell they praised him more vigorously. I was told that was the right thing to do. Briefly, these and other considerations gave me a feeling that the praise of God was being overdone. Incidentally, I also wondered whether the prayers and petitions to God at all hours of the day were not being overdone. I also wondered whether God was not bored with the continuous praise that went up to him. My own parents would have been tired of so continuous worship, and I paid God the compliment of thinking that he was as good as they were.

Later I learned that the Greeks called this kind of praise "the nectar of the gods," and that explained a lot. It was an assumption that it was praise and prayers that kept the gods in being. When prayers cease the gods sink to nothingness. In my later readings I discovered that this neglect was the only disease from which gods—wherever they were—died. Then, later, still in my early teens, I came across the writings of that great Roman satirist, Lucian, and in one of his supreme satires he pictures the gods gathered to discuss why it was that so few prayers reached them. After a great deal of discussion, Momus, an insignificant god, said to Jupiter, the principal god, "We are here by ourselves and can speak the truth. What can we expect from the people when they see the confusion and disorder of human life? The most blameless are left

to perish in poverty, sickness and thralldom . . . while the most vicious and profligate are loaded with riches and honours. If the truth must be spoken, our whole employment is to sit here and pay no regard to anything but whether our oblations are diligently paid and the smoke of incense regularly ascends from our altars. . . . It therefore serves us right if mankind after a while open their eyes." That might have been written yesterday instead of about sixty years after the alleged death of the God Jesus.

### One or Many

To get back to our one god versus a multitude. I went on wondering why one god was "nobler" than two or three, or a crowd. My answers were as before. Like Alice in Wonderland, things were getting "curiouser and curiouser." I was advised to go to the Bible. That seemed to be good advice, except that the Bible was just reeking with gods. And they were always fighting or scandalising each other. The Bible did not help the "one god only" theory. Moreover, the Bible—the only book ever written by "the finger" of God—said distinctly "Thou shalt have no other God but me," and it would have been nonsense if, after saying that, the same God said he was the only God existing. It looks like a case of a would-be monopolist trying to beat a competitor. It was a religious version of "Be sure to use Smith's corn plasters only." All the Bible God tells his people is that they must not go about worshipping other gods. God was the first great monopolist. His was the kind of warning that English subjects must not swear obedience to a foreign country. To clinch the matter, this much is plainly set forth in the Bible, "I, thy God, am a jealous God." God is really more honest than his present-day followers. He affirms the existence of "other Gods." They declare that these Gods did not exist. God was mistaken.

But to clinch the matter of this one God versus a multitude discussion, God contributed to more than one book. He caused to be written another publication called the "New Testament." In the old Bible there were at least two Gods—God and Satan. One occupying hell—and earth—and the other limited to heaven. But the New Testament raises the number of gods to three—God the Father, God the Son, and a third party, the Holy Ghost. We can, of course, visualise the father God and the suddenly publicised Son. But the Holy Ghost? What is it like? Who is he? The information becomes more confused when we discover that the three are one. How does that happen? It is quite true that in the case of a registered trading company we can treat the said company as a single item, or person. But by what method can we telescope three gods into one? All that is left for us to do is to assume that there really is more than one God in existence, and that combined they take on the character of a limited company and may be dealt with as a single



entity, or a group of individuals, just as we feel disposed. Nevertheless, if we bear in mind the multitudes of angels and devils that exist—if we follow Christian calculations—we really have clouds of gods of one order or another.

The position becomes still stronger if we bear in mind the myriads of gods that flourished in the non-Christian world. Gods of ancient Egypt, of Babylon, of Assyria, of South America and of many other places. It is evidently not justifiable to assume there is only one God, and that he leads a very lonely existence. Gods were once very plentiful. Perhaps it was when a monopoly in the form of "Thou shalt have no other God but me" came into play that the gods began to decline in numbers. The responsibilities of individual gods were divided. There were different gods for different purposes, and the god market had a busy time. There was also a certain comradeship among them. Each god had his field of operation, and a failure here and there was easily overlooked—or forgiven. But with only one God above water the responsibility was easily fixed, and one by one worshippers dropped out, until we have reached a stage where the gods are shrinking into nothingness. It would not be amiss if one day a great monument was raised—not to the gods that *might* have been, but to all the gods that have ever existed.

I was glad to find that I have on my side no less a person than Anatole France. He points to the safety that lies with a quantity of gods and the dangers that follow a single deity. He says:—

"One god, if he makes a mistake, brings disaster on all who believe in him. Even if he be wise, he has but one sort of wisdom suitable to one sort of man.

The gods of the Greeks, owing to their diversity of character, are more fittingly adapted to the diversity of the human temperament. These gods live in harmony together, though they do not agree on a single point. In the Trojan war, some sided with the Greeks, some with the Trojans. That alone taught the Greeks to have broad views. There were divinities for every temperament. An Aphrodite for the voluptuary, a Pallas Athene for the seeker after wisdom. None of these deities was free from failings, but their failings were mutually corrective.

In all there was more beauty of restraint than of might and greatness. They did not crush their worshippers with their immensity. They were human. Their history was credible, and you were not compelled to believe it. Nowadays we are forced to believe in an impossible God. The great advantage of polytheism is that there were no dogmas. You were at liberty to think what you liked, even about the gods, with nothing to fear save a temporary fit of anger due to threatened prerogatives or to excited passions. But intolerance, with all its dread consequences, was impossible. Its dread sequel was impossible. Zeus had his weakness, but he was wise too, and he showed it. As for the God of the Christians, he cannot shed his Jewish origin, and that explains his terrible ferocity and a whole host of paltry meannesses. Even in the years that have elapsed since his sojourn on Mount Sinai he has not succeeded in acquiring a thorough polish. He is a twaddler and a lie-a-bed. He thinks a great deal too much about cookery and love-making.

Moreover, he has one terrible fault, he is a logic chopper. For a word, a syllable, he would lay waste the world with fire and sword.

The God of the Deist cannot be called One God. Every Deist makes his own God and contemplates himself therein. He does not obtrude himself over much. The God of Plato, of Jean Jacques Rousseau of Beranger, never did anyone any harm. As for Victor Cousin's God, he had a strange adventure. In his old age he turned Christian, and no one mentions him now."

It would be impudence to try to improve Anatole France.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## CATHOLIC CANT

THE bare-faced impudence of some Roman Catholics who act as publicists for the Holy Shop is only equalled by the ignorance of others who are ready to believe whatever they may be told by these publicists.

Time and again has the old lie been told by Catholic dope-peddlers that marriage outside the Roman Church is not valid, time and again has the lie been refuted, not only by Freethinkers, but by religionists of other denominations than the Roman, and even by honest-minded Catholics themselves whose social principles sometimes stand higher than their religious ones.

But the Lord's Liars are not merely opportunists who might stand shamefacedly corrected when found out in their perversions. They are soured by the rancid reek of Romanism to an extent that makes them incapable of playing a decent game of polemics on any question, or of conceding that there are aspects of life in which people have outgrown the infantile habit of nourishing themselves on Papal pap and priestly puerilities, and have begun to feed on the more solid stuff of social wisdom. One of these aspects is that of marriage. In ever-increasing numbers young people are deciding that the civil form of marriage (the only legal form) is all that is necessary to enter into a domestic partnership with dignity and decency, and they are cutting out the tomfoolery of church ceremonies, which exhort them to be fruitful and multiply for the sake of the Lord, without paying any regard to the economic considerations involved, and which bind them till death do them part without any regard to possible failure of the arrangement.

Consequently, it cannot pay "The Catholic Herald," either in the short run or the long run, to repeat such deliberate theological lies as the statement that a marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptised person is invalid unless a dispensation is secured from the Church.

To be brutally frank, if a Catholic and an unbaptised person wish to marry it doesn't matter a damn about a dispensation from the Church—and the Church knows it! There is only one form of marriage in this country. That is, civil marriage, with or without the piecrust of a ceremony in church. Anyone, from a Catholic to a Calathumpian, can be married, legally and properly, to an unbaptised person—even to a "blatant Atheist." It has been done and constantly is being done. One of my own friends is in that position. The Church may say she is no longer a Catholic, but who cares what the Church says? She says she is, and I know of no copyright in the title.

At the same time, however, "The Catholic Herald's" theologicalian, in accordance with the practice of his theohooligan prototypes in the Church of former days, does concede something, under sheer social pressure. Dealing with the question whether a marriage between a non-Catholic and an unbaptised person is valid, he agrees it is, if the civil formalities are observed. That is a very generous concession, coming from a Church that



once denounced all marriages except the romances of Rome. I suppose that in the moral sphere this step is almost as important as the decision made in the physical sphere about 120 years ago, when the Church graciously consented to permit the earth to travel round the sun—150 years after Copernicus and Galileo had scientifically established the fact. So the Unchanging Church does change a little sometimes, and despite its "unchanging" claims we may echo Galileo's famous phrase: "But it still moves."

Movement alone, however, is purposeless unless considered in relation to direction, and the Church moves both backward and forward. Forward when it is compelled by other influences, backward when it follows its natural inclinations. Where questions of family limitation are concerned, for example, Mother Church goes back with a jolt—back to the jungle principle of mass breeding, heedless of the scientific fact that our more selective way of living in organised society does not require indiscriminate breeding, paying no regard to the survival value of quality as against simple quantity, and ignoring the social factors which, in human society, call for control of breeding if humans are to have lives that are individually worth while. In raw nature mass breeding was necessary, regardless of individual values, to preserve the species; in raw religion mass breeding is governed by a similar principle, but it is the Church which is seeking to preserve itself. The same disregard for individual values, however, operates in each case, and it will be as necessary for man to combat the evils of mass religious breeding as it was to govern the mass breeding of primitive life, if the higher individual values in life are to be preserved. Submerge the individual in the mass and you lose everything associated with the higher culture and development of mankind, and return to the state in which there may be plenty Homo but no Sapiens, plenty of the Primate species, but no primacy of species.

Witness, in testimony to my charge of Catholic mass-breeding principles, the campaign of the Leeds Catholic Parents' Association, which has scared the Leeds Health Committee into supporting a ban on contraceptive machines, and on contraceptive advertisements in public vehicles. These fighters for freedom (Roman variety) represent only five per cent. of the community, yet their conception of freedom is such that they can induce an official body to deprive the remaining 95 per cent. of advertisements and machines which might be a convenience to them.

What is it, however, that the Catholics really fear in this connection? It cannot be the thought that the 95 per cent. might be induced thereby to refrain from contraception. Surely they are not stupid as that! Perhaps they are afraid that some of their own five per cent. might learn something that the Church does not want them to know. If so, what a testimony to the value of Catholic teachings that Catholics, themselves should so fear the spread of contraception in their own ranks. What a confirmation that moral outlook is fashioned by social conditions and not by religion.

But now hearken to Mr. Fielding (chairman of the delegation to the Leeds Health Committee) shedding tears on behalf of the Catholic crocodile while putting a case for Government control of contraceptives:—

"... it was difficult to imagine a more degrading anti-social and un-Christian occupation for young people than the manufacture of contraceptives, and the districts which were the centres of the trade were known to be hotbeds of juvenile corruption. Government control would throw daylight on the activities of those who were making fabulous profits..."

Now if Mr. Fielding and his Church are really concerned about degrading occupations, fabulous profits, and Government control, they might pay a little attention to armament factories and a

few other industrial black spots in which all these evils exist, jointly or severally. They might even include those factories in which Catholic "junk" is made—places where people spend their lives manufacturing Romish totems, fetishes, and other tripe, for the purpose not of preventing excessive physical birth, but of preventing intellectual birth. As for the "hotbeds of juvenile corruption," Mr. Fielding and other Catholics would be wiser to refrain from using such phrases, because non-Catholics might be reminded of the existence of Catholic schools and the position they hold in connection with juvenile delinquency figures. Leeds Catholics should be very careful, as Bradford is only nine miles away, and Bradford is the home of the famous Henshaw Report, which showed that while only 6.5 per 1,000 of state school children found their way into the delinquency ranks, 15 per 1,000 of Catholic children managed to figure there.

Which reminds me that despite the Henshaw Report, which shattered the idea that church schools produced better children than state schools, the City Council at Bradford has granted a cool quarter of a million to Catholics in the city to build four new schools, the sum representing 75 per cent. of the cost, or, in other words, 25 per cent. more (as a free gift for Catholic privilege) than the new Education Act stipulates need be given. Despite protests in the Press which clearly indicated that the people are fed up with the dual system, only twelve out of a Council of 80 had the courage to put their names against the proposal on a recorded vote.

Which, in turn, reminds me of what I have said many times before—that our fight to-day is against a more subtle foe than decadent theology. This fact is emphasised when a self-proclaimed "unbeliever" can justify, on such an occasion, the granting of a huge sum for the specific purpose of bringing up children in the rudest and crudest superstition of the Western world.

Like Madam Roland I declaim.

"What crimes are committed-

In Thy Name!"

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

### FEWER BABIES

A journalistic topic often belaboured nowadays is that "Britain is doomed if her falling birth-rate continues." This at a time when it is next to impossible to rent a house in any part of the British Isles; and when mechanisation displaces labour far more effectively than wars.

Poor Mother! She is becoming less and less a man's breeding machine; and governments and their literary henchmen do not like it. Big families were conceived in the days of uncontrolled sexual passion, each child was a further burden upon the breadwinner, and mothers were enslaved evermore to their homes. Enlightenment of the sexual act and contraceptives have been the means to the small modern families; and one cannot imagine a return to the good old animal days.

What does it really matter if the British Empire falls to pieces, and if the English-speaking peoples diminish to insignificance? We are not a chosen people. The one hope of world brotherhood is from a society wherein all peoples, white, black and yellow mingle without nationalistic, linguistic or sexual barriers.

E. HANSON.

**THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH?** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

**\*MISTAKES OF MOSES**, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

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



## ACID DROPS

Says the Lord Bishop of Chelmsford, "If the wind of God were to blow over our country we should achieve the hope and expectations when the whole world looked up to us." Well, who's a stopping of him? If God makes up His mind to blow common sense into parsons and a conscientious sense into our political masters, who—we repeat—who can stop him? He could make politicians honest and preachers truthful, He could make all men considerate and honest in their dealings. Why doesn't the wind of God blow? What happens is that poor struggling humans do what they can to make the world better, and when they succeed God steps in and takes all the credit for it. Of course, for all we know God may have blown. Perhaps it was He who did the blowing in the case of the recent terrific blowing that did so much damage to life and property in the great storm a few weeks ago. So we advise all not to urge God on, or let your prayer go, "Oh, please don't start blowing, you did terrific damage on the last occasion."

The Catholic Church has been boasting of the large number of new followers they have. Of course, once a Catholic a man or woman remains a Catholic until he or she is formally discarded. But properly considered the Roman Church, like other Churches, is shrinking. Not even the threats and plans for holding people that the Roman Church has is proof against the influence of time and development. Here, for example, is the testimony of Mgr. Adamson, of Liverpool, who says, "The number of Catholics attending Church is becoming less and less. The number of lapsed Catholics was great even before the war; it is greater now. The problem is sufficient to engage the Church and Catholic action for many years to come."

Of course, the blame for the decline of "worshippers" is placed on the war. Mgr. Adamson says that "religion is ignored and even ridiculed. We have even to defend the existence of God." But that is not a product of the war, although the war may have made the decline more rapid. The war simply shook a number of the better and the more thoughtful members of the Churches and set people considering their position. It is an illustration of the old saw, "You can fool all the people some of the time, but you simply cannot fool all the people all the time." But we expect that the Church is awake to that fact.

Dr. Hans Frank has been placed by the Polish Government at the head of their list of war criminals. He was responsible for the deaths of many thousands of Jews and Poles. He has now become converted, although it is possible that he was already Christianised before the war. But he was born a Catholic, so far as we know he remained a Catholic, but we believe some of the Catholic papers are treating him as a convert. It is said that he now "reads the scriptures and talks with the priests." But we doubt that God will so influence his judges that he will be set free—to become a propagandist of the Catholic Church. But of course, one never knows.

The Bishop of Lichfield, Dr. E. S. Woods, is one of the more intelligent of present-day clergymen. Speaking in the Cathedral, he said, "There is tendency to enjoy sex without realising the responsibility and sacrifice which must be present." Gloomily he added, "There are no longer any prostitutes in a professional sense because there is no demand for them. There are so many amateurs." If that be true, one wonders what has become of the power of Christianity, when it can so easily be pushed in the background when a war breaks out.

Of course, a lot of this is just nonsense. What we are seeing is the normal consequence of all wars. You cannot take all the manhood and womanhood, set aside the claims of domestic and social life, teach men and women, beginning with those in the early "teens" and fill them with a delight in killing, and sacrifice the demands of a civilised humanity without paying a price. There has never been a war of any size or duration that has not threatened the solidity of social life.

Finally, Dr. Woods is himself an illustration of deterioration under the stress of war. Before the war the Christian Churches had been getting more and more tottery. Their congregations were getting smaller and their doctrines were disregarded right and left. The Churches tried to protect themselves by using a very old Christian weapon—lying. They began to talk morals, when the great historic Christian teaching was that mere morality could not save a man from damnation. All the death-bed repentances were based on this principle. The dull were taken in by the Church talk about conduct, the more sensible concluded that good conduct was not the private property of the Churches. They were trying to save their lives by committing suicide. What the Church is experiencing is the consequence of trying to live on lying.

Once again we get an instance that the Church is God's house, it is a sacred building; and He "called" a certain person to be His servant and to preach how He, as a Heavenly Father, helped him in his work. And—? Well, the other day burglars entered St. Michael's Vicarage and took £15 in cash and some pieces of jewelry. Also the thieves entered St. Mark's, Noel Park, and took £21 and sixpence. They also took a meal in the vicar's pantry. Some one should write a book on the impartiality of God.

The Bishop of Blackburn recently told his audience, "The powers that be do not want religion. Public opinion does not see any need for religion." That looks as though it is time for shutting up. But the Bishop is made of stern stuff. He knows that nothing but Christ can save this country. We can only say he has been a hell of a time on the job. Can it be that Jesus toured the country, stopped and looked in a church or two, and then decided that the people were not worth saving? He should have waited to see the non-religious who do not worship but who do what they can to civilise the churchites.

We congratulate the inhabitants of Stockport that at last they have, after years of fighting, resolved to have cinemas on Sunday, and unless Stockport has improved very much we can say that there are few places in England that needed brightening up more. The vote in favour was two to one—with God and his parsons against. No one is prevented from going to Church. Neither are they now prevented going to the cinema. According to the opposition it is a question of God versus the Cinema. According to the voting God has been beaten two to one. What will the clergy do about it, or, contrary, what will God do to them for not managing things better?

Those who are genuinely working to bring the German people as a body to a reasonable measure of civil development, to take a proper and honest part in the future life of Germany, would do well to keep an eye on the tactics of the Roman Church. The present development of Poland looks as though the Roman Church in Germany, which before the war was one of its strongholds, will in the future be reduced to a much lower level. Judging from some of the articles in the Roman Catholic papers it looks as though the Church is now manoeuvring to play the part of the friends of the discontented German people. It cannot but be the case that the Germans will suffer much in the course of the re-education of their country, and this will offer a fine opportunity of Rome to play the part of a god-sent saviour. We have not space to say more at the moment, but the tactics of the Roman Church are very easily seen and should be carefully watched.

Dr. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, London, was disturbed when at a R.A.F. station he attended, some of the men regarded the English Church as part of the whole set-up which they regarded as dead. We disagree, the Church is not dead, it has life enough to do a considerable body of harm. There are dead gods galore and one of these days the Church of England God will follow the road that others have trodden. But, unfortunately, that time is not yet.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

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

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

This is not exactly a "Sugar Plum," but we have no other part of the paper available. We are sure that all our readers will regret that for several weeks Mr. Palmer will not be sending us his interesting and much appreciated articles. Mr. Palmer suffered a collapse in the street and was at once rushed off to a hospital where he still is. We visited him as soon as we knew of his illness and found him looking very much better than we had expected. But he will have to rest for some weeks. I am sure that we are voicing the feelings of all our readers when we wish him, on their behalf, a speedy and complete recovery.

We think the following letter which appeared in the "Oxford Times" is worthy of notice:—

### "BACKWARD PIDDINGTON"

"Sir,—Without any preamble, I am frankly disgusted. I have just returned from six years' service with the Armed Forces, and I find that my children—six and seven years respectively—cannot read! At the same time I am informed that they have been commended for religious knowledge! It seems to me that the whole object of this Church school is religious knowledge. I am not against this training, but the Church, to my mind, is the proper place for such training.

"In case you may think my children are unusually dull, I find that a child of eight years (only to mention one) cannot read simple English. This is a sad state of affairs.

"This Church school to my mind is obsolete, and I believe that the present Government think on something like the same lines. To-night I have received a pamphlet from the village parson. From this I learn that we can read 'Suffer the little children to come into Me,' and understand these words, because we have a school in the village, and so all of us can read—but the fact remains that my children cannot read!

"So much for education. The pamphlet also tells me that 'the marriage register we are still using here was begun in 1887, the year Queen Victoria came to the throne.' I also think that the water system in Piddington came into being about that time! In fact it was 1885—but this is 1945. Why can we not have the water in the houses or at the door?

"This also affects the school, as the existing sanitary arrangements there are primeval.

"The pamphlet advocates the Church school. I think the school, like the sanitation and the water system, is a thing of the past.

"I have just seen Nazism crash to the ground after six years of hard fighting. I am inclined to believe that Piddington is in the grip of some such system.—Yours faithfully.—'SCOTTY.'"

The Blackburn Branch N.S.S. holds another lecture to-day in the Public (Lecture) Hall, Northgate, Blackburn, when Mr. F. J. Corina will speak on "Freethought or Christianity" at 7 p.m. This is one of a series of lectures arranged by the local branch. Mr. Corina is a clear and forceful speaker and the proceedings should provide a very interesting Sunday evening for Freethinkers and Christians.

There have been lively goings on at Bradford in connection with religion and the schools. From one of the local papers we learn that Mr. Corina, so well known to Freethinker readers, played a prominent and successful part in the discussions. We shall be giving further information in our next issue.

Hats off to the "slickness" of the Bishop of Bristol. In an article in the "Church of England Newspaper" he says that, "We do not as a nation deny the existence of God." Now we like that "as a nation." One could not say the bishop was lying if we could find but a couple of hundred who believed in God. The evidence is that "on such occasions as V E Day we still flock to Church to take part in services and prayer." Well done, O bishop! But what must God think of it all when he has to stage a world war in order to get a full house? May he not think that if the only occasions when the people will flock to Church is when there is a "show" on, may not even God think that the game is almost played out? After all, gods have their feelings, and we take it that the Christian God is not quite so easily fooled as the Bishop of Bristol appears to believe.

Unfortunately, the optimism of the Bishop of Bristol is knocked out by the report of a special commission of the Church of England to discover the situation of Christianity in this country. The report of this commission is before us. It says that, "The English are still more deeply influenced than they know themselves by Christianity." That seems rather a difficult situation to discuss. It is no use asking for proof when the evidence is admittedly not possible.

Perhaps the next thing will be that the editor of the "Freethinker" is a Christian without knowing it. We do not see how one can disprove the statement. For as Christianity has come to mean almost anything, it may be held by anybody, and it may mean whatever one cares to make it.

But the very next paragraph gives more light and seems to knock the early statement to pieces. Here it is:—

"There can be no doubt that there is a wide and deep gulf between the Church and the people. How far the rift has gone . . . cannot be measured . . . Evacuation has opened the eyes of one half of the inhabitants of this island . . . with the result that they are opened very wide indeed."

Dealing with the men and women in the Forces the commission goes on to say:—

"The evidence of chaplains and others in close touch with all three Services and munition factories . . . testifies with one voice to the fact of a wholesale drift from organised religion. The irrelevance of Church in the life and thought of the community is apparent from two symptoms which admit of no dispute. They are the widespread decline in church-going and the collapse of Christian moral standards."

And that seems to give an adequate answer to the optimism of the Bishop of Bristol.

But it is very difficult always to dodge facts. And there is another confession that explains a lot. The Bishop says, "I do not believe that anything is more serious at the present time than the fact that the great majority of our people have not any real sense of the supernatural." We believe that to be touching one of the causes of the decline of religion. With a simple-minded people the supernatural is something that is actually *natural* in its constant influence on human beings. But gods of all shapes and colours and qualities belong to the supernatural and their activities should always be on hand. But the growth of the "natural" as against the decline of the supernatural gives us an understanding of the causes that bring the decline of gods of all qualities. The Bishop of Bristol spoke with greater wisdom than he thought.



## SOME NOTES ON ARCHEOLOGY

## VI.

WHATEVER else the new archeological discoveries have shown, it is a fact that there are some critics who insist on the priority of Latin over Greek as the language in which the Gospels, or at least one or two of them, were originally written. But what has been the stumbling block always in comparing Greek and Latin texts is the difficulty of reconciling the hopelessly different readings which they so often represent. Dr. Cobern in his "New Archeological Discoveries" says that "every great text critic now believes that the variations of text, either in the classics or in the New Testament, are due, not chiefly to wilful corruption, but to ignorance. Ignorant as the scribes were who wrote some of the Greek minuscules, few of them can be compared in this respect with the Latin scribes." And he cites as an example the Codex Corbeiensis, one of the celebrated Latin versions, spelling Paul as "paulus," "laulus," "paus," and even "populus." All this puts the "fact" of "Divine Inspiration" in a rather dubious light, though apologists hastily point out that Inspiration is only claimed for the "original" writings. Yet, strange to say, it did not take long for these "originals" to be thoroughly corrupted.

Do all these corruptions, then, these various readings and faulty spelling, to say nothing of obvious interpolations, affect the "purity" of the text? Not a bit—according to Dr. Cobern. He claims that the collation of 4200 Greek MSS. "confirms the integrity and purity of the New Testament text." One has only to go through the Variorum New Testament to see what nonsense a learned theologian can write when under the influence of religion.

In addition to various texts and versions, archeologists have come across many MSS. purporting to give "new" sayings of Jesus not reported in the Gospels. Needless to say, these are just as wonderful, or very nearly as wonderful, or even greater than anything hitherto discovered about Jesus. The sayings must be his because nobody else could possibly have said them—just as the story of the woman taken in adultery must be true because it is so very typical of Jesus—though an undoubted interpolation in the Gospel of John. To a lay mind like my own—utterly irreverent—some of these new "sayings" are drivel; in any case what are we to say of this "preface" found in a fragment discovered in 1903 at Oxyrhynchus: "These are the (wonderful) words which Jesus the living (Lord) spake to . . . and Thomas; and he said unto (them), 'Everyone that hearkens to these words shall never taste death . . .'" Any saying which "sounds good enough," contends Dr. Cobern, really must be attributed to Jesus. There you have theological criticism at its best.

It seems to me that early Christian writers had only to attribute their work to an apostle, and when found by an archeologist it would be lauded sky high as one of the world's greatest discoveries. The newly-found Gospel of Peter and also the Revelation of Peter must be Peter's because it says so; or if not by Peter, must be by a friend of Peter, or written down by Christians from tradition, or—but what do reasons matter? It is a wonderful discovery, and we must let it go at that. After all Peter might have written it!

Then we get newly-discovered Acts of Paul. There is, of course, not a scrap of evidence that Paul had anything to do with it and every indication that it is nothing but unadulterated fiction. But does that matter? Dr. Cobern gives a summary of it, and we learn, apart from all sorts of adventures—some even with his girl friend Thecla—that Paul was finally beheaded under Nero, "but afterwards reappears." I cannot see why believers

in the resurrection of Jesus should jib at the resurrection of Paul. Surely all these stories come from the same mint.

For Dr. Cobern, however, the difference really is "that between a religious history and a religious novel." The Apocryphal Gospels are not "wilful fabrications," but "may well have been written by men who trusted to the memory of aged people who had actually heard Jesus speak or had listened to sermons from the apostles or their successors." And if some of the stories are stupidly silly, well, that may be due only to a little "misunderstanding." The idea that the Gospel writers were in the main either unmitigated liars or were writing Gnostic or other mystical allegories in the guise of history, never seems to occur to Dr. Cobern.

He mentions the discovery of many Bible sites and towns as if these confirmed Bible stories. The fact that the "White Horse Inn," which Mr. Pickwick visited, still exists in Ipswich, does *not* prove the veritable existence of that estimable gentleman. In surrounding his characters with real topography, Dickens added to the verisimilitude of his story, and that is all that can be claimed for the Bible. The discovery of Ur, even if genuine, does not and cannot prove that there was ever such a person as Abraham.

In excavating Christian tombs and burial places very interesting information has been gathered about the life and habits of the people, but a good deal of what appeared to be speculation on the part of Freethought writers has also been thoroughly confirmed. Dr. Cobern is obliged to admit that "much of the Egyptian religious symbolism was adjusted to the new Christian faith. The picture of Isis nursing Horus became a forerunner of the Madonna and Child . . ." Here then we have a Fundamentalist Christian admitting, on the strength of recent excavation, something pointed out in many early Freethought works and of course ridiculed by the Church as a whole. But if we now know for certain that Isis and Horus were the models for Mary and Jesus what about the other resemblances?

Dr. Cobern gives an illustration of the Swastika which he declares was "used as a Christian emblem from the earliest times not only in the Roman catacombs but also in Egypt." I should like to see a Christian comment on this as well as on the fact that the Roman Catholic Hitler chose a Roman Catholic Christian emblem as his trade mark.

Sufficient has, I hope, been said in this short series of articles to show how very little, if anything at all, has been found through excavations which supports in the smallest way the Gospel narratives. Temples, synagogues, and churches have been discovered, packed with interesting revelations of many things, but of proof that there ever lived a Jesus or, for that matter, a Peter or a Paul, there is not a scrap. There are thousands of inscriptions to pagan deities—in one Artemis is actually called the "saviour goddess"—and those to Jesus run on the same lines. But the latter are all comparatively late, when the Christian religion was well established, and the remarkable thing about them is the way they run on pagan lines.

And finally. In all his big book of 700 pages, Dr. Cobern scrupulously avoids the word miracle. The only witness worth considering to Freethinkers excavation can produce is a witness which proves, not the "trustworthiness" of New Testament narratives in general, but that of the miracles described therein, in particular. What evidence has any of the various Exploration Societies given us that one single miracle has ever occurred? Or to put it another way. Would any witness discovered through excavation prove the truth of *any* miracle? Is it possible to imagine such a witness? And if so, how many of our men of science would accept him?

Freethinkers indeed can welcome excavation; it is the Christians who must in the long run fear it.



## FAREWELL, MR. WELLS

IN an article published in the "Sunday Express" on 21st October, Mr. H. G. Wells predicted the end of the world with the same certainty that any lesser mortal would prophesy the end of Mr. H. G. Wells. The difference is, of course, that the world has existed (so the astronomers tell us) for 2,000,000,000 years and Mr. H. G. Wells for only 79; the planet having thus a little more background than the prophet. Even so, an eminent American critic, H. L. Mencken, was writing of "the late Mr. Wells" over 20 years ago.

It took 800,000 years for the light from the Great Nebula to reach the astronomically microscopic speck upon which we live—it takes Mr. H. G. Wells some 70 years of contemplation to conclude that the world, nay, the universe, will disintegrate coincidentally with himself.

I do not believe it Mr. Wells! You are on a safe bet in prophesying the end of civilisation as we know it, and the world as we know it, but to put a period to your prophecy is to place you on a level with those divines to whom, for centuries, the end of the world was always at hand. Was it not recently fixed by an American minister of the gospel for a few Thursdays back?

You were amusing and entertaining in your fanciful "First Men in the Moon" period; you interested us with your novels before invention flagged and, sure of your mental superiority you started to lecture us.

You wrote a history which compared favourably with Winwood Reade; you bored us terribly with "William Clissold"; you cried "wolf" ever more frequently in such efforts as the "Fate of Homo Sapiens." But now—your personal Swan Song is to be the funeral march of the universe; Amen to the music of the spheres!

In the character of "the writer" (why do you pontificate in the third person?) you announce your conclusions that "if his thinking has been sound, this world is at the end of its tether."

"The writer's" conclusions are to be accepted without evidence or reasoning simply because they are Mr. H. G. Wells' conclusions. I repudiate such dogmatism. I refuse to accept my death sentence from the pen of "the writer's" arbitrary tribunal on "the writer's" expert evidence.

No, Mr. Wells, you can't take us with you!

ANTHONY JAMES.

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

"WE must safeguard the freedom of the Press." Is there a journal in this country which has not at some time or other printed these words? "We must not have a controlled Press like Russia, Italy or Germany" they say. Now what exactly do they mean?

The meaning seems quite plain to me. British newspapers want to publish just what they choose, and I contend that is exactly what they are doing. Anything the proprietors and editors dislike and wish the public to dislike is printed in the most unfavourable odour, criticised in a one-sided manner, libelled and slandered. Anything in favour of such matter (or pointed questions as to the bona fides or authenticity of the reports) is also carefully kept out of the columns.

Surely the essence of freedom is the right of equal publicity to the pro and anti of any question, giving true, undistorted facts, withholding nothing, that unprompted opinions may be formed. Name me one national or county newspaper which carries this out. I maintain there exists not one from the "Times" to the "Daily Worker" inclusive.

About a couple of years ago, Alderman Baddeley, a noted Leeds citizen, passed away. "The Yorkshire Post" and "The Yorkshire Evening Post" (Leeds papers) printed long accounts

of his career and public work, but the fact that Mr. Baddeley was an Atheist was carefully omitted. Of his funeral, one of the largest seen in the district for some considerable time, not one word of its Secular ceremony appeared in either paper. One can imagine the half-column replete with hymns and officiating clergy had the deceased ex-Lord Mayor been a Christian!

Another point, very noticeable. During the war thousands of Service and C.D. personnel got married, but what paper ever published a picture of a happy pair leaving a Registry Office? Many newspapers include columns of "Readers' Views," "Readers Write," etc., but publicity generally depends upon what the readers write. I correspond regularly with "The Northern Echo." "Hear All Sides" is the heading, but some sides are permitted to be "heard" with far greater volume than others. The Dean of Durham objected to the erection of an electric power station near the Cathedral. He got nearly a column to himself. Some of us who saw more sense in the employment of hundreds of workmen were allotted hardly the same space between us!

A week or so ago "The Yorkshire Evening Post" printed a paragraph ridiculing the "divinity" of the Jap emperor. I wrote a letter asking why Christ's divinity was never printed in inverted commas, pointing out the millions of people who believe the same of Jesus Christ as the paragraph suggested of Hirohito. I received the usual "letter acknowledged" slip, but no publicity. During the election campaign, and before it, whilst one may have been permitted to criticise Churchill, quotations from that gentleman's past calumnies of Russia were never permitted to appear. Generally speaking, on world economic and political questions, that is, vital questions apart from propaganda, all journals are curiously alike.

One may express views which are Anti-Russian, German, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, French, Italian, American, Scandinavian, Scottish, Irish or Welsh, but anti-Hebrew, never! Is there anything more ridiculous?

The Bible, its religions, and the present generations of its tribal authors are rigidly protected by all editors' pencils. Now, what national newspaper could survive on the mere support of Bible enthusiasts and the Hebrews? Is it not the vast mass of others whose support is mainly responsible for the six and sometimes seven-figure wills of the Press Lords. A "free" Press. Far too free to menace and curtail public liberty. No greater organ of mass suppression exists. Though I may be severely taken to task, I indict all newspapers, because they draw hundreds of millions of pounds per annum from the public, scarcely function as a reliable news service, and their real educational value, like their contribution to public liberty, is practically nil.

G. L. C.

## 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.

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., S. K. RATLIFF: "The Enigma of India." Tuesday, Conway Discussion Circle, 7 p.m., Prof. A. E. HEATH, M.A.: "Science and Civilisation."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA: "Freethought or Christianity?"

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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. WILLIAM BALDIE: "A Sermon."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Dr. C. A. SMITH: "Scarcity Morals."



## "THE YOGI AND THE COMMISSAR"

BECAUSE Arthur Koestler fails to realise that orange, yellow and green are not composed of red and violet, he also fails to appreciate that common sense is not a combination of exaggerated idiosyncrasies. Just as our physicists are surprised to discover that electrical phenomena displays electrical characteristics, so also is he bewildered in discovering that man is a social animal. His analogy of the Yogi and the Commissar as opposite ends of the social spectrum does not enable him to explain social and psychological aspects of evolutionary development. Just as our scientists, in trying to explain all things in terms of one, find themselves in a tautology, so also he, in striving to reduce his mathematics to the number two, finds himself in a *reductio ad absurdum*.

This book is a collection of essays written at different times, but in spite of the "resulting patchiness" are meant to be considered as a whole. These essays are full of interest because of both the breadth and depth of his experiences, actual and literary. And he has a purpose in reviewing recent political and economic development. This book is not just a cry in the wilderness but a serious attempt to find out what was wrong, and in fact to find an antidote for the disillusionment which must affect many like himself if the facts are as he portrays them.

There is great difficulty in trying to estimate the consequences of the Russian experiment, not only because of the rigid control and censorship and the cordon sanitaire, but also because of the feelings engendered. "The pressure of the environment cramps art as it cramps behaviour." The intelligentsia have an important function to perform and the necessity of the times is to cling more than ever to "The ragged banner of independent thinking." It is not at present a very popular "banner." In endeavouring to grapple with this situation he is up against a problem in psychology, and he develops a theory of a somewhat mystical character—"We all live in a state of split consciousness. There is a tragic plane and a trivial plane which contains mutually incompatible kinds of experienced knowledge... the real tragedies are camouflaged by a smooth triviality."

As a consequence he no longer believes that "The economic process by itself creates its own superstructure," that is "culture, art, mass psychology." He now considers that "Political economy and cultural development are merely two aspects of the same basic process." Marxist analysis is over-simplified, and Communist psychology, based upon the hypothetical notion of a "Class consciousness" has never been "demonstrated by a psychologist." So, in spite of a slow and steady improvement in social conditions "The cumulative effect in the psychological sphere was a growing frustration and disillusionment." Hence the total failure of "The Left to analyse, explain and counteract the phenomenon of Fascism."

There can be no doubt as to the character of Fascism, which is "The survival of archaic beliefs in an ultra-modern setting." The emotional and superstitious appeal was deliberately cultivated. "The Fascist myth was undisguised and explicit. The opium was doled out by the leaders." On the other hand the "Soviet myth," by which he means, not "The developments in the Soviet Union, but their psychological reflection in the European Left," was of a different character. Like all genuine myths, "It responded to certain deep and unconscious cravings." The Soviet myth was merely "The new occasion for the renewal of an archetype." Like its past symbols—the golden age, the land of promise, and the kingdom of heaven—"It offered glorious compensations for a life of frustration." "Russia became the kingdom of heaven for those who most keenly felt that paradise was lost."

For a time after the revolution, myth and reality seemed to coincide, but as time went on the gap between them widened.

The history of the Soviet Union is not one of advances alternating with retreats, "The curve of development ascends during the first decade... and from then onward shows a continuous fall." The appearance of the first "Proletarian millionaire" completed the development. "The new incentives have been replaced without exception and in all walks of life by the (old abandoned ones." Socialism in one country is now the equivalent Russian patriotism, while Socialism is identified with industrialism and social inequality. "The necessity for the Soviet regime to fight in the name of Suvorov instead of Marx, with a national instead of an international anthem, with Czarist epaulettes, Pan-Slav slogans and under the blessing of bearded Orthodox priests is the final proof of the breakdown of socialist incentives."

To suspect the Soviet regime of "Counter-revolutionary deviations" would be too cheap. The explanation is rather the continuous adoption of "Temporary expedients" with dialectical justification; still using the same words, but with different meanings. It is a case of a tragedy obscured by trivialities, until "The official slogans have dropped all ideological pretence and have completely reverted to the traditional pre-revolutionary symbols." The Soviet Union is now not only a form of State capitalism but it is controlled by a "Ruthless Asiatic Byzantinism."

Given the choice between Commissar and Blimp, Koestler chooses Blimp. The hope of the future lies through the democracies, and "The Left has to shed its illusions and regain its ideals."

Though his point of view and my own are as the poles asunder, yet my sympathies are with him. It will not do to satisfy ourselves that the Russian experiment has achieved something. As I see it, if a man sets out to swim the channel, he ought not to be satisfied to reach the end of the breakwater.

A final warning. This book should not be read by those who are in the habit of only reading what they agree with. He treads on so many corns.

H. H. PREECE.

## WOMAN

Man's greatest weakness—woman! All through the ages men have disillusioned themselves of the day they first made love to her. In her youth she ensnares them with her physical attraction; in the thirties with her mature charms; in middle-age she commands respect; and in old age she fills us with humility.

She leads some to degeneracy; some to hell; a few to heaven, and a lot to a life of toil. History has ignored, reviled and distorted her, superstition claimed her for its own. But she is not unique, Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, yours or mine; in her veins runs the blood of centuries. Tear away that superstitious veil that has always obscured her, and what do you find? A very human being like yourself.

E. H.

**CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT?** By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Christianity from a not common 'point of view. Price 2s.; postage 1½d.

**ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day.** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

**THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS,** by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

**PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS,** by J. M. Wheeler. Price 2s.; postage 2d.