

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Are We Christians ?

I have a suspicion that some of my readers may easily feel that my last week's notes departed somewhat from the topic in hand. If I am right in my conclusion I can assure all interested that I was fully alive to my departure from the strict and narrow path. Of course, a straight and narrow road may look well, but it does not always enable one to see all that is to be seen. A very little bearing to the right or to the left may easily open vistas that would otherwise never be seen. There is a recognition of this in the old maxim that the longest road may be the quickest way home. For example, that much talked of person, a visitor from another planet, after a talk with a bunch of up-to-date parsons might easily conclude that the chief function of the clergy was the development of social life. But looked at from another angle, he might finally conclude that the priesthood is one of the factors that prevent development. History—which is often written for home consumption only—presents Christianity in a very different picture than results from critical reading. That would present Christianity as beginning at a time when there existed a developed civilisation, but which sank lower and lower with the increased power of the Christian Churches. He would discover that it was under Christian influences that the ancient civilisations decayed and presented the world with what are known as the Dark Ages, and after that he would probably agree with Gibbon in describing the victory of the Christian Churches as a victory of barbarism and religion. . . . It is fairly certain that had Gibbon followed the strict and narrow road he would never have written "The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire."

The Law and the Church

It will be remembered that in his broadcast dealing with the question "Are we a Christian people?" Mr. O'Sullivan said very emphatically, we are not. The conclusion came with all the force that such a decision should come from a man whose business it is to understand the law. He cited two instances in support of his decision. One was the abolition of the religious marriage. That to-day offers all the authority that running round the mulberry tree has. With the exception of the Roman Church, which insists on the religious marriage in addition to the legal one, that question is definitely settled. The priests of the established Church humbly obeys orders, and when the marriage takes place in a church it is because both the priest and the church are for the time being non-religious. The religious marriage, in the eyes of the law, is dead. It is without standing.

But there is another important point which Mr. O'Sullivan stressed. This was, for the first time in our

history, the declaration by the House of Lords, the Supreme Court of Law, that the registration of a company, one aim of which is anti-religious, is quite lawful. It is these two things that lead Mr. O'Sullivan to his conclusion. He appears to have waited very patiently before he gave his message to the world—unless it is that the B.B.C., with the dishonesty and cowardice that has marked its handling of religion, feels that some bits of truth concerning it must be let out. But the two things having occurred, it has compelled Mr. O'Sullivan solemnly to proclaim that England is no longer a Christian country. What is "biting" me is whether England has ever been a Christian country—in the full sense of the word.

I think we may set aside that period during which the Roman Church was the only Church in England. For the Roman Church would never have agreed to its being a part of England. It was, of course, *in* England, but it was there as an independent association, not as a part of the secular State. The Roman Church was there in England and it received payment from the English people (the Church has always taken plenty when it could, and has complained when it couldn't) and it has laid down rules—direct from Rome—and it became very wealthy. William Stubbs, Bishop of Oxford, and an authority on constitutional history, says:—

"We may regard the clergy or clerical estate as a body completely organised, with a minutely constituted and regulated hierarchy, possessing the right of legislating for itself and taxing itself, having its recognised assemblies, a judicature and executive, and, although not as a legal corporation property, yet composed of a great number of persons each of whom possesses corporate status by a title which is either conferred by ecclesiastical authority, or is not to be acquired without ecclesiastical assent."

Add to these items the charges made by the monks when people were alive, and the demands made on the property of the dead, even when the "property" of poor people would sound as part of a very bad joke, and still we have no more than a religious organisation. It was not a Church of England. It was a Church *in* England, no more than the Roman Catholic Church at Westminster is part of the Church of England. It was from the Christian Church that we got the term "secular," to mark the religious side of life from the unreligious, or anti-religious.

With the expulsion of the Roman Church and the confiscation of as much wealth as could be got hold of, a number of Ecclesiastic Courts were created, which filled the gap left by the Roman Catholics, although in substance there was little difference between the two. One heritage from Rome was left in the shape of an Act which provided the death penalty for heresy and blasphemy. That Act was abolished during the reign of Charles II. At present there is only one Act against heresy, and that is one that was

passed during the reign of William III. After two modifications the final Act ran:—

“Any who shall by writing, printing, or advised speaking assert that there are more gods than one, or shall deny the Christian religion to be true or the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be of Divine authority, shall upon conviction be deprived of all office or employment, civil or military, or of a profit arising from them. And if they so offend a second time, they shall be disabled to sue, or prosecute in any court of law, to receive a legacy, to be the guardian of a child, or execute or minister a will, shall be deprived of any office for ever, and shall also suffer three years’ imprisonment.”

That is a fine example of the meanness and brutality that religion will drive people to. It only remains to say that there is no record of anyone ever being summoned under that Act. And that was certainly not because of the scarcity of “sinners.” Lord Chief Justice Coleridge called the Act “infamous.” But it was very, very Christian.

I will only add that I am not personally indictable under that Act. It is applicable only to those who have been brought up in Christianity, or who had at some time made a profession of belief in Christianity. With great forecast, I selected non-Christian parents. And I never made any profession of Christianity. I have led a tolerably clean life. I wish that some Christians I have met could honestly say the same. It may be true, as the B.B.C. morning preachers insinuate daily, that Christians cannot remain honest and decent without constant supernatural assistance. But I have my doubts. I cannot but believe that Christians could be as decent as Atheists—if they will only try.

The Great Fight

Readers will remember the final stroke which assured Mr. O’Sullivan, K.C., that England had no longer the right to call itself a Christian country. Personally I have a conviction that England never was a Christian country. It was merely a country that gave a help to Christianity. But that would take too long now to argue. But Mr. O’Sullivan believes that England finally ceased to be a Christian country when the House of Lords decided in our favour that the Secular Society Limited was declared to be a perfectly legal association. More than that, four of the five judges who sat discussing the matter actually agreed that the scores, even hundreds, of men and women who went to prison for attacking Christianity were wrongly charged and imprisoned.

The story commences with the attack on the “Free-thinker,” which was founded in 1881. On Thursday, March 2, 1883, its editor, G. W. Foote, was in the dock at the Central Criminal Court charged with the impossible crime of blasphemy. The judge was Justice North (whose venom contrasted conspicuously with the gentlemanly conduct of Lord Coleridge later in a second charge on April 24, 1883). The jury disagreed, but the judge was determined to secure a verdict of guilty. At the earliest possible moment, three days later, the case came on again, and this time Justice North had his way. Foote, after two very fine speeches in his defence, was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment. He left the dock with his head up, with the biting retort to the judge that his verdict was worthy of his creed.

Then came another charge for same offence. But this time the judge, Lord Coleridge, was polite where the other judge had been coarse. Considerate where no consideration was granted. The Court was the Court of Queen’s Bench, and in an exchange of compliments, Foote was able to say that he had for the first time seen how a case should be conducted. But in the course of the trial the judge said something that was to lead to a revolution in the handling of this fantastic “crime” of blasphemy. He pointed out the absurdity in neglecting the changes in opinion concerning this offence of “blasphemy.” He agreed with Foote’s plea that the times had changed. Jews had become judges, and it would be ridiculous for one to be called on to try a man charged with attacking religion and perhaps forced to sentence him for blasphemy. His ruling was that the very essentials of Christianity might be attacked without that attack necessarily opening a man to a criminal charge. It was a great judgment, and it was to bear fruit. It fructified in the creation of the Secular Society Limited. The Christians were to pay for their venomous holiday. I need only add that in the case before Lord Coleridge the jury disagreed. But the persecutors did not care to risk another charge before such a judge, and the case was withdrawn.

But the judge offered one ruling in his address to the jury. He pointed out that it was, as all blasphemy trials have been, trials at common law, and common law has not the rigidity that statute law has. Charging the jury, Lord Coleridge laid it down that the very essentials of Christianity might, properly expressed, be attacked with impunity. That has been the ruling case ever since, and it is quoted wherever English law has influence. It led to the Secular Society Limited. We will deal with that next week.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded)

PREECE—“THE YOGI AND THE COMMISSAR”

H. H. PREECE, in his review of Koestler’s outburst of exploded dreams, fails to realise what the book *implies*, and also what the U.S.S.Rian leaders *have done*. He, himself, tells us the chief cause of his failure in the sentence: “Though his point of view and my own are as the poles asunder, yet my sympathies are with him.” “Emotionally,” H. H. P. “feels” towards the U.S.S.Rian leaders as Koestler does; and, if we can *understand* the “How come?” of K., we can understand H.H.P. What his point of view is on the “rational” side he doesn’t tell us; but, in “The Freethinker,” September 2, 1945, he concludes an article, thus: “There is no middle course, it is the difference between ignorance and knowledge, between Freewill and Determinism, Theism and Atheism.” That was in the “physical sciences; but, to be “logically consistent and intellectually sincere” (J.M.R.), he would use the same system of scientific analysis in Evolutionary Sociology—or would he? Historically, the “feelings and emotions” came before the “rational” tendencies, and these are still the dominant characteristics in many—or most—individuals. Reversing that process, take the sociologic question first: What did the U.S.S.Rian leaders set out to do and to what extent have they succeeded?

The first part of the question has been much confused, not only by those who desired to confuse it, but also by the way in which many “Communist Party” members express it. Let us state “Lenin’s” objective, thus: “That a united disciplined party, scientifically understanding its purpose, should be ‘always prepared’ to give the lead to and for the ‘common

people' and to make that lead effective at the 'psychologic moment' to seize political power and establish economic Socialism as the basis for the new form of social existence." They did not intend to establish "Communism," as theoretically defined; and, except for a confused use at times of the word, they do not claim to have established it. The "psychologic moment" began at the "October (Lenin's) Revolution," 1917; it ended on November 16, 1920, by the defeat of Wrangel. A long moment, but the most momentous moment in history—not excepting the mythical Resurrection.

As to what the Russian achievement—not "experiment" now—has done, I would advise H. H. P. to read "The Philosophy of Betrayal" by Lewis and Bishop. They express it differently from me; but they *do* prove that many of the alleged "facts" in K.'s book are not "facts" at all. Surely, in spite of his "sympathy," H. H. P. can appreciate that? Then, proofs in full about specific developments in industries, sciences, art, etc., are available from non-U.S.S.Rian sources. Also, there is no "split-consciousness," now, with the U.S.S.Rian people. Their new cultural modes are developing precisely because these are arising out of the new social conditions based upon economic Socialism. Our new culture has yet to begin; precisely because our social existence is still on a basis of economic individualism which—as some knew in 1891-94—*must* lead to private profit monopolies, economic cum ideologic; which *must* lead to war (and still *must*); and which "inevitably" prevent human individuality developing in the great majority. Lack of space prevents more on this.

Marx's, rather than "Marxist," "Analysis" is oversimplified"; quite true, and he admitted it. He paid most attention to the economic factor in human social evolution, not only because it is the basic factor, but also because, previously, it had been neglected. The N.S.S., "The Freethinker" and C. C., have had to counter the lamentable drift to the other extreme—economics, *per se*.

"Class-consciousness" was no mere "hypothetical notion": it was Marx's method of combating "National consciousness" (patriotism) and "Religious consciousness" (spiritual or Godist unity in belief) or, as sometimes, patriotism and religious belief, by which minorities of privilege and power were able to use the common people of one land against the common people of another (cp. the MacDonald-Baldwin policy of a Western European economic combine linked with a Latin-Catholic bloc and with the expected Christian Corporate Super-State of Monsignor (Dr.) Seipel in Austria. That was the avowed bitter anti-Soviet ideology cum economic power then, and still is, as we see in France; only, now, Morgan's, of New York, guard the bonds). Marx did not go further on that ideologic line, because he was too expectant that "reason" would lead the "common folk" of every land to "unite, irrespective of nationality colour, creed or sex," against their minorities of power. I am expressing this in my own words, as used for years, but it is according to Marx's teaching.

"Stalin" began his great victory—as great as "Lenin's"—by realising that nationalist sectional interests plus religious sectarian interests were too strong. The struggle could not be for Socialism against Fascism: it must be to save political democracy from Fascism. So started the demand for the united front against Fascism. Victory has been won—so far; and, if the "liberated peoples" have genuine free democratic elections, they can have a basis in economic Socialism—if and when they want it. Their peoples may challenge their parties to do it—even as the British people challenged the Labour Party.

The "emotional" side ought to be easy to understand. Kropotkin and Emma Goldman—good people, both—went to the new Russia, expecting to see the Anarchist-Communism of their dream-ideals. Finding that it was not, and not understanding that it could not be, they reviled what had been won.

So with the other dream-idealists, whether their dreams come from some godism, from the fallacy of exaggerated reason, or from a heavy-supper mixture of the two. Science in sociology has succeeded where dream-idealism has proved a snare; but the dream-drunk still will swear that moral suasion and spiritual power might have done it. The Buchmanites are still busy. Anthony James has summed up H. G. Wells ("The Freethinker," November 18, 1945), but there are others who still dream their dreams as before and still become mentally inflated by their spiritual myths. Of all the dreamers of the "ought-to-be," Upton Sinclair, though he thinks in the individual and concrete, still keeps a level head and can see what has actually happened. If any one desires to understand what F. D. R. had to fight, and what we may yet have to face, economically cum ideologically, I advise them to read the fifth volume of Upton Sinclair's world wars series, "Presidential Agent." Sinclair is *not*, like Wells, inclined to sing the Swan Song of Humankind.

This is not written from any party political point of view—either for or against. It is an attempt to make a sober scientific estimate of what has been done by the leaders of the U.S.S.Rian peoples; and, I hope, a corrective against H. H. P.'s "sympathy" for Koestler. "Pity" is the better word.

Anyway, wherever I go, the majority of the workers regard the U.S.S.R. as the leaders in the new world.

ATHOSO ZENOO.

THE PUPPET SHOW

Is the World but made of paper?
Just a toy stage where we caper
In the Limelight, for a Day?
Dummies dented, bent and battered,
Cut in cardboard, torn and tattered—
Put on show—then cast away.
In this Life of silly strutting
Ours is not the shaping, cutting—
We but answer Cue and Call.
We must do as we are bidden,
Never kick, though hardly-riden—
Mindless, spineless creatures all!
Dare to argue, try to reason—
That is heresy and treason
'Gainst the Country, Church and King.
Hopeless is the twisted tangle,
Helplessly we dance and dangle—
Puppets on a Piece of String!

Though we grumble, stagger, stumble,
Each one has his Piece to mumble
And his little Part to play.
No applause our efforts gaining,
No rewards for striving, straining—
Pain and Suffering's our pay.
Bid us seek—we fall down praying,
Bid us kill—we do the slaying
Though we know no bitter hate,
Innocence and Trust betraying,
In sadistic Drama playing—
Titled "At Perdition's Gate"!
Why must we enact this slaughter?
Why not fill this Life with laughter?
Why not let us dance and sing?
Ah, my friends, I cannot aid you!
Why not ask the One who made you—
Puppets on a Piece of String!

W. H. WOOD.

ACID DROPS

From the "Colchester Gazette" we get the information that a man known as Prince Gypsy Lee was fined £30, with five guineas costs for fortune-telling. Mr. Lee lacked sense and caution. Fortune telling—if the forecast has to do with this world—is a criminal act. But if the fortune-telling refers to the next world, and if the fortune-teller announces himself as a servant of God, he may prophesy as much as he pleases, and receive as many "presents" as people care to give him. He will most probably escape the law. More than that, if he is ingenious enough to call his place of business a chapel he may even found a new religion and become famous. Consider the amount of money that is raked in by the Roman Church for prayers for the dead and the like. Really there are so many methods of robbing with impunity that one loses all sympathy for those who are caught and condemned.

The latest report on religion in the U.S.A. is that there are in that country 256 different religious sects. Of course, the U.S.A. covers a great area, but 256 different Christian bodies, each building on the same god-directed, sacred books, doesn't offer anything that is flattering to the common sense of either the God who inspired or the humans who were the recipients of his inspiration. If some poor human being wrote a book in such a way that different people gave it a different interpretation he would be laughed into obscurity. But God does not do things as we do. For that we feel the better.

The enormous prices that were paid in the sale of goods that were once in the German Embassy, recall our insistence about fifteen years ago that Hitlerism was essentially a religious movement. We did not believe that a group of men and women could act as the torturers of men and women, and children, in the name of their "great" leader Hitler. He insisted that he was a servant of God, and we think that it might have been said in honest faith. Normal human nature could never have stood the strain involved in the tortures we have had described to us, the infliction of which became a sacred duty. And now we learn that among the buyers of goods were men who honestly declared that in Germany Hitlerism will be re-established. Meanwhile they will worship their god and wait. There was a lesson in that sale room.

A writer in the "Church Times" declares, as multitudes of others have said, that proclamation of belief in the Gospel has no value unless one has a sensation of "Sin." But the writer should have expressed himself plainly. For if he is a good and deserving believer he does not think of "Sin" as including such trifling as committing a murder, or a robbery, ill-treating one's wife, or robbing one's friend. These might be classified as *wrong* actions, and you might be pardoned. But to have a sensation of "Sin," means something far more serious. It means that, after damning everybody, so as to make sure he did not miss anyone, God declared that every person born was so burdened by a *religious* sin that it could never be wiped away until God forgave him. Christianity is a pretty creed when one analyses it.

At the Church Assembly Canon Fry put forward the suggestion that in the next census there should be a column devoted to "What Religion." The Bishop of London seconded the proposal and said that it might help to dispel the stories that England is a semi-pagan country. We should not be at all surprised if it could be made a fair and honest calculation. As it is we should have placed on the list as "religious" without their understanding what religion is, and many others are in a position where they would find it rather difficult to be honest where a confession of Atheism might mean loss of a situation or loss of trade. In this Christian country of ours plenty of people have to pay for being honest and courageous, and truth is not such a respected thing that it would serve any purpose except that of helping the Churches to exercise a greater unfair pressure than they do at present.

Canon Fry was, however, opposed by a flight-lieutenant who pointed out that recruits were often in a quandary as to what was their religion, and the sergeant would say, "Stick him down C. of E." The result was "that Churchmen in the Forces had been cumbered by the dead wood which statistics had attached to their communion"—by which we suppose he meant that the Church had been blamed for the faults and failings of men who were definitely not C. of E. The flight-lieutenant said that the religious figures in the census would be equally artificial, which is probably quite true. But does not this fact and supposition prove definitely that England is not "Christian" in any honest sense of the word? The motion was, of course, carried.

There is one feature about Christianity in a modern environment that should never be overlooked. It is amusing and the more seriously it is taken the more humorous it becomes. For example, the Provost of St. Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow, explains that the disregard of marriage is due to the non-recognition that marriage is something that is called and directed by God. We cannot say it is not, but we are certain that if it is, God is about the poorest "director" possible. Of course, the vast majority of marriages work out well enough, but then a growing proportion of people have nothing to do with God. The Provost says that, "Marriage in a registry office has nothing to suggest that it is anything but a contract on the human side." Well, that is all that it can be, and all that anyone need desire. And after all, marriage is legally a contract between two people to which the State is a witness. And if God regulates marriage He is often a very bad picker.

When the Christian Church was at its full strength it had a short and simple method of dealing with scientific teachings. If they agreed with Church teachings they were allowable. If they were not in agreement they were false and were suppressed. So far all was simple and clear. But at the close of the Dark Ages, Mohammedan science and the revival of the Greek philosophy were making inroads on the province of the Church: so a new and ingenious theory was evolved. It was decided that a statement might be false in theology, and yet true in science, or *vice-versa*. This was useful, and in the circumstances suited both parties. It gave students of nature greater freedom than they otherwise would have had, and it enabled the Church to "save its face" by permitting a teaching it could not altogether suppress.

We note a very useful couple of letters in the "Blackburn Times." One is by the president of the Blackburn Branch of the N.S.S., and the other by one who signs himself "Friar Tuck." Letters of this kind do much good and often the seed planted in what looks like barren soil produces a gratifying plant—or plants.

There is an association which bears the staggering title of the "United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation." We understand that one is allowed to take a rest after announcing the title. But not satisfied with this title, one of the members moved that there be added, "Believers in God." The suggestion was out-voted. So we suggest that one of the members gets the society to pass a resolution to add the words, "We have nothing to do with gods." Or even "Gods not admitted." Once the matter is raised the situation should be clarified.

"It is," says the "Church Times," "because we believe in Christian truth that we are determined by every means in our power to uphold the truth everywhere." A fine sounding declaration this, but why "Christian truth?" Truth is truth in whatever way it is expressed. It stands for the identity with fact, whether that fact be of a material or other nature. We are afraid what the "Church Times" has in view when it talks about truth is, first, the truth of the Christian religion, and secondly, the truth of their truth concerning a particular view of Christianity. And by the time that truth runs through this or that Christian sect, poor commonplace is likely to be badly shaken.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. J. PYE.—Much obliged for item of news.

E. JAMES.—Yes, the Chapman Cohen who edits this paper is the one you remember. It is rather a pity that you lost touch with the Movement, but it is never too late to mend. If you ever visit London we should be pleased to recall the past, and it usually makes the present the brighter.

R. ROSE.—Many thanks for reference.

The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 from A. L. Jones (Rhodesia) to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

In answer to several inquiries the publishers of the "Road to Endor" are Messrs. John Lane, at the Bodley Head, London.

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.

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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

We are greatly indebted to those friends who keep us supplied with items of news in the local and general Press. But often the items sent are neither dated, nor is the name of the paper given from which the extract is taken. We often have to put on one side an interesting item for that reason. Will, therefore, our many friends complete the favour done by giving the date and name of the paper from which the item is taken?

In 1943, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York appointed a commission with orders to find out why Christianity was losing ground. Towards the end of 1945 the commission reported and confessed that the loss of ground was very real and suggested some ways in which a part of the lost ground might be regained. "Might" is the term that we think the commissioners will agree with, but the days when such a commission could wind up with a glowing report of good times ahead are gone. The game, however, has been played too often, and to-day it would deceive not even the most sanguine of believers. Of course, strange reversals have taken place, and we must admit that Church leaders as a rule are famed as artful dodgers, but there is a limit even to the artful dodges of archbishops and the gullibility of those on whom these distinguished people live.

The report of the commission was issued a few months ago, and the present position of the English Church is depicted as black as can be. We will take, for the present, one section which appears under the title of "The situation before the Church." Only a few words need be said by way of comment.

"There can be no doubt that there is a wide and deep gulf between the Church and the people. . . . The evidence, therefore of chaplains and others in close touch with all three Services, and with munition factories, may be accepted as conclusive. They testify with one voice to the fact of a wholesale drift from organised religion."

On this we need only comment that it is precisely of these three Services that the gang of professional preachers that broadcast to us the certainty of the hold religion has. The B.B.C. reports that among the Forces there has been a steady growth of religion, and it has never missed praising the religious fervour of two or three of our Generals, who, if they had been as foolish with their war plans as they are with regard to religion, would have lost the war long ago. The lies of reports and the clash of events naturally differ.

Lies having not been quite so effective as it was hoped they would be, the lie of a moral decay as a consequence of a decline in religious belief is suggested, but it is admitted that "The past century has been pre-eminently the most humane period in history. The contrast between the 'Hungry forties' of Charles Dickens' time and the England of to-day shows an advance in the social, political and economic status of the masses with which no other epoch can compare."

We may remind all concerned that the period with this great moral and social advance is a period in which the theory of evolution has been definitely accepted, when the attacks on religion have been most telling, when the science of anthropology has been firmly established, and the claims of the working class have been made in the name of humanity. We can agree with the commission that "The vital question that has now to be answered is, 'Why has such a drift from the Christian religion occurred to a people of this nature?' The answer was before the commission. Social development has been in proportion to religious retrogression. If Christians had been of a better type the evils of dark doings of the first quarter of the nineteenth century would never have occurred. That a handful of Christians acted better than other Christians is what one might expect. From the date given to the birth of Jesus down to to-day Christians have varied much in their qualities. Unless some Christians had been better than their creed, life would have been impossible.

At the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow, Mr. F. J. Corina will speak for the local N.S.S. Branch to-day at 6-30 p.m., on "Freethought or Christianity?" Mr. Corina is a clear and forceful speaker, and in the comfort of the Cosmo Cinema a usefully spent Sunday evening is promised. Admission is free, with some donation tickets, which may be had from 75, George Street, Collet's Bookshop, Dundas Street, or at the cinema door.

"The Evil of God's Love" is the subject of a lecture to be given by Mr. F. C. Blore in the Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North, Belfast, to-day at 7-30 p.m. It is part of the syllabus arranged by the Belfast Branch N.S.S. The branch is making headway and invites all unattached Freethinkers willing to help to get in touch with officials present at the meeting.

We were very pleased to see in the "Manchester Guardian" the following letter:—

"COMPULSORY CHURCH."

To the Editor of the "Manchester Guardian."

"Sir.—The following notice appeared to-day on the order board of --- Field Regiment, R.A.:—

"Battery Order No. —, dated November 17, 1945.

"CHURCH SERVICES."

"Field Marshal Montgomery has decreed that each man will go to church once a month. There will be no parades, but each man will be required to sign to the effect that he has attended service, giving date, in a book kept in N.C.O.s' billets. Troop S.M.s will arrange for necessary books.

"Will you please do your best to get this order quashed and to remind the Field Marshal that his mission is to destroy tyranny not to create it?—Yours, etc.,

"B.A.O.R., November 17.

"GUNNER."

We hope that other men either in the Army at present or who have served in the Army will add their protests to that of "Gunner's." The Field Marshal has won his reputation not on account of his fantastic religion, but for his ability as a soldier. Had his reasoning with regard to war been as stupid as his religion he would never have been heard of. The war was to be a war for freedom.

THE UNITY OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL LIFE

IN the course of "What Is Man?"—the very serious work of Mark Twain, and declared by S. K. Ratcliffe, in a preface, "to be built around what Twain conceived to be the final truths of experience"—the conviction is stressed that "a dumb animal's mental machine is just the same as man's and its reasoning processes the same." Dispelled, to the extent that Twain succeeds in proving his thesis, is the Biblical fiction that the human race is a distinct creation, entirely apart from all other forms of life. Extracts that I propose to give appear in "What Is Man?" in dialogue between an Old Man (Twain) and a Young Man, thus:—

Old Man: If you should hand Mr. Edison a box which you cause to fly open by some concealed device, he would infer a spring, and would hunt for it and find it. Now an uncle of mine had an old horse who used to get into the closed lot where the corn crib was and dishonestly take the corn.

I got the punishment myself as it was supposed that I had heedlessly failed to insert the wooden pin which kept the gate closed. These persistent punishments fatigued me; they also caused me to infer the existence of a culprit, somewhere; so I hid myself and watched the gate. Presently the horse came and pulled the pin with his teeth and went in. Nobody taught him that; he had observed—then thought it out for himself.

His process did not differ from Edison's; he put this and that together and drew an inference—and the peg, too; but I made him sweat for it.

Young Man: It has something of the seeming of thought about it. Still it is not very elaborate. Enlarge.

Old Man: Suppose that Edison had been enjoying someone's hospitalities. He comes again by and by, and the house is vacant. He infers that his host has moved. Awhile afterwards, in another town, he sees the man enter a house; he infers that is the new home, and follows to inquire.

Here, now, is the experience of a gull, as related by a naturalist.

The scene is a Scotch fishing village where the gulls were kindly treated. This particular gull visited a cottage; was fed; came next day and was fed again; came into the house next time and ate with the family; kept on doing this almost daily thereafter. But once the gull was away on a journey for a few days, and when it returned the house was vacant. Its friends had removed to a village three miles distant. Several months later it saw the head of the family on the beach there, followed him home, entered the house without excuse or apology, and became a daily guest again.

Gulls do not rank high mentally, but this one had memory and the reasoning faculty, you see, and applied them Edisonally.

Young Man: Yet it was not an Edison and couldn't be developed into one.

Old Man: Perhaps not; could you?

Young Man: That is neither here nor there. Go on.

Old Man: If Edison were in trouble and a stranger helped him out of it, and next day he got into the same difficulty again, he would infer the wise thing to do in case he knew the stranger's address. Here is a case of a bird and a stranger as related by a naturalist. An Englishman saw a bird flying around about his dog's head, down in the grounds, and uttering cries of distress. He went to see about it. The dog had a young bird in his mouth—unhurt.

The gentleman rescued it and put it on a bush and brought the dog away.

Early the next morning the mother-bird came for the gentleman who was sitting on his verandah, and by its manoeuvres persuaded him to follow it to a distant part of the grounds—flying a little way in front of him and waiting for him to catch up, and so on; and keeping to the winding path, too, instead of flying the near way across lots. The distance covered was

four hundred yards. The same dog was the culprit; he had the young bird again, and once more he had to give it up. Now, the mother-bird had reasoned it all out: Since the stranger had helped her once, she inferred that he would do it again; she knew where to find him, and she went upon her errand with confidence. Her mental processes were what Edison's would have been. She put this and that together—and that is all that thought is—and out of them built her logical arrangement of inferences.

Edison couldn't have done it any better himself.

Young Man: Do you believe that many of the dumb animals can think?

Old Man: Yes—the elephant, the monkey, the horse, the dog, the parrot, the macaw, the mocking-bird, and many others. The elephant whose mate fell into a pit, and who dumped dirt and rubbish into the pit till the bottom was raised high enough to enable the captive to step out, was equipped with the reasoning quality. I conceive that all animals that can learn things through teaching and drilling have to know how to observe, and put this and that together and draw an inference—the process of thinking. Could you teach an idiot the manual of arms, and to advance, retreat, and go through complex field manoeuvres at the word of command?

Young Man: Not if he were a thorough idiot.

Old Man: Well, canary birds can learn all that. Dogs and elephants learn all sorts of wonderful things. They must surely be able to notice, and to put things together, and say to themselves "I get the idea now: when I do so and so, as per order, I am praised and fed; when I do differently I am punished." Fleas can be taught nearly anything that a Congressman can.

Young Man: Granting, then, that dumb animals are able to think upon a low plane, is there any that can think upon a high one? Is there one that is well up towards man?

Old Man: Yes. As a thinker and planner the ant is the equal of any savage race of men; as a self-educated specialist in several arts she is the superior of any savage race of men; and in one or two high mental qualities she is above the reach of any man, savage or civilised.

Young Man: Oh, come! You are abolishing the intellectual frontier which separates man from beast.

Old Man: I beg your pardon. One cannot abolish what does not exist.

Young Man: You are not in earnest I hope. You cannot mean to seriously say there is no such frontier.

Old Man: I do say it seriously. The instances of the horse, the gull, the mother-bird, and the elephant show that those creatures put their this's and that's together just as Edison would have done it, and drew the same inferences that he would have drawn. Their mental machinery was just like his, also its manner of working. Their equipment was as inferior to his, in elaboration, as a Waterbury is inferior to the Strasburg clock, but that is the only difference—there is no frontier.

Young Man: It looks exasperatingly true; and is distinctly offensive. It elevates the dumb beasts to . . . to . . .

Old Man: Let us drop that lying phrase, and call them the Unrevealed Creatures; so far as we can know, there is no such thing as a dumb beast.

In further exchanges, Twain goes on to say in reply to the Young Man's comment: "Then there isn't any difference between man and the other animals except in mental quality":—

"That is about the state of it—intellectuality. There are pronounced limitations on both sides. We can't learn to understand much of their language; but the dog, the elephant, etc., learn to understand a very great deal of ours. To that extent they are our superiors. On the other hand, they can't learn reading, writing, etc., nor any of our fine and high things, and there we have a large advantage over them."

Young Man: Very well, let them have what they've got, and welcome; there is still a wall, and a lofty one. They haven't got the moral sense; we have it, and it lifts us immeasurably above them.

Old Man: What makes you think that?

Young Man: Now look here—let us call a halt. I have stood the other infamies and insanities and that is enough; I am not going to have man and the other animals put on the same level morally.

Old Man: I wasn't going to hoist man up to that.

Young Man: This is too much! I think it is not right to jest about such things.

Old Man: I am not jesting, I am merely reflecting a plain and simple truth—and without uncharitableness. The fact that man knows right from wrong proves his *intellectual* superiority; but the fact that he can do wrong proves his *moral* inferiority to any creature that *cannot*. It is my belief that this position is not assailable.

The views of Twain, thus expressed, may be fittingly rounded off with the remark by Mr. Ratcliffe, in his preface to the book, that Twain "was always proclaiming in violent language that 'the damned human race' was morally below the most shocking animal," and that as regards the popular notion that man was "a being on harmonious terms with his environment" Twain said:—

"Man adapted to the earth? He can't sleep out-of-doors without freezing to death or getting rheumatism or malaria, he can't keep his nose under water over a minute without being drowned; he can't climb a tree without falling off and breaking his neck. Why, he's the poorest, clumsiest excuse of all the creatures that inhabit the earth."

FRANK HILL.

CORRESPONDENCE

A SUGGESTION.

Sir,—I cannot help thinking that it seems to be a curious yet commonplace paradox of our prosaic existence in this world to-day that our individual idiosyncrasies, traits of character, foibles, mannerisms, personal charms, etc., are never honoured or even mentioned in public print, such as these becoming evident and recognised only in obituaries when the characters concerned have taken their journeys "over the border." These obituaries are usually meticulous in stressing details of the above-mentioned facts and often run to a dozen lines of Press comment, such for instance, as that quoted in a recent issue concerning the passing of Mrs. Josephine Ainsley of Darlington.

Personally I am a staunch supporter of the doctrine of honouring the living! I also strongly condemn the universal custom whereby enormous waste of expense is daily incurred in placing useless and very expensive flowers upon the last resting place of the dead—which moneys would have been more humanely employed and expended in providing comforts and relief to the surviving members of the deceased's family (as often as not children); but this is by the way.

I can see no cogent reason whatsoever in affording such space taken by long obituaries in the Press. I would vastly have preferred to become known to the above lady during her lifetime instead of being kept in ignorance of her very existence until the obituary notice appeared.

Surely we ought, by now, to be able to take such eulogies and homage more or less for granted. A simple three or four line comment should serve, as the very fact of the insertion appearing being enough to acknowledge all claims upon our sympathy and understanding, embodying a final appreciation for service rendered to our cause during the deceased's lifetime.

Instead, therefore, of employing such long obituaries, could they not be shortened, and the little space released used to better advantage by the insertion of a few names of active freethinkers dwelling amongst us, giving a thumb-nail sketch of their aims and achievements, ago and address, etc.? Any of us so inclined

could then write and thus exchange greetings, views, criticisms and so forth, and so get to know, admire, and love them for their deep and abiding honesty of purpose and courage. There must be some stout-hearted men and women in our ranks, open-hearted enough to permit their names being mentioned in a forum of this kind.

I can only regret that being a comparative newcomer to the Freethought ranks I have not had the pleasure of coming into personal contact with many of your followers. I am happy and proud to have got to know the two or three "apostles" who so kindly inducted me into the temple of the "N.S.S.," and the realm of the "Freethinker," which has already done so much to enrich my knowledge of religious shortcomings. I look upon my fellow freethinkers as a staunch body of valiant and warm-hearted men and women, and I hope to be able to improve my existing knowledge by being able to meet more of them in the near future, especially any of those who share my particular interests and recreations such as enlightening books, music, financial reform, etc. All the same I do not wish to be accused of raising controversial issues in my foregoing remarks, although I will gladly listen to any voices desirous of protesting at what I have stated.

I conclude, Mr. Editor, by remarking that I have recently been fortunate enough to pick up in the local second-hand book market here in Newcastle/Tyne, two volumes of Moncure D. Conway's Autobiography, being the 1904 edition published by Cassell & Co. This illustrious man wrote the famous "Life of Thomas Paine" and I am following his discourses with great interest especially as he came into actual contact with Emerson and Thoreau in Concord, U.S.A., whose literary efforts have so charmed us through the passing years. It was strange to find that Conway himself commenced adolescent life by becoming a Methodist preacher on circuit and then later on he became influenced by some admirable Quaker doctrines, and thus in the course of a few years he developed into and gained lasting prominence as one of America's foremost Freethinkers of his time.—Yours, etc.,

E. H. SIMPSON.

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SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday 12 noon, Mr. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., S. K. RATCLIFFE: "The Power of Illusion." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., MARTIN DAVIDSON, D.Sc., F.R.A.S.: "The Impact of Astronomical Development on Human Thought."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. F. C. BLORE: "The Evil of God's Love."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. H. M. SMITH: "Crime."

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA (Bradford): "Freethought or Christianity."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., HENRY SARA: "Thought Transference."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, Manchester).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. DAN GRIFFITHS (Llanely): "Religion and Education."

OUR LIBERTY-LOVING PRESS

WE think the following letters will be of interest to our readers. We are not disclosing the name of this particular paper mainly because it fits any of our daily or weekly papers. Here they are:—

Reader to Editor.

"DEAR SIR,—I have been a regular reader of your paper for many years and have enjoyed its many good features, not the least of which is the refusal to indulge in coarseness and ultra-sensational news such as that proffered by some well known newspapers.

"Perfection, of course, is hardly to be expected and I have tried to be tolerant with occasional features that (to me) are somewhat irritating, namely, articles strongly savouring of religious propaganda and a tendency to publish photographs and social notes about anyone who is even remotely connected with the family of Lord Kemsley. I realise, however, that such features may be enjoyed by others.

"With the recent introduction of the 'Saturday Thought' however, I consider that you are permitting religious propaganda of the worst type. The article given on Saturday last, September 22, was futile and illogical, whilst the hearsay quoted in the fifth paragraph is just pure childish nonsense.

"The smug remark that 'the practical Atheist is not necessarily wicked' (see paragraph four) shows the state of mind of the Rev. A. W. Harrison, whilst he would find his statement 'Man is fundamentally a religious animal' (paragraph six) much easier to quote than to prove.

"Such articles give satisfaction only to the worst types of religionists: its poor logic will certainly never 'convert' a single Atheist. Do please be sensible and terminate this rubbish, otherwise I shall be compelled to spend my humble penny on a newspaper which concerns itself with the main job of printing news and leaves the task of broadcasting 'uplift' to those who, standing to profit by the maintenance of the religious status quo, still imagine it possible to continue hoodwinking the public and retain with regular doses of such claptrap a state of unquestioning servility.

Yours faithfully, etc."

The Editor replies.

"DEAR SIR,—Thank you for your letter. It is most interesting. I cannot attempt to answer it within the confines of a letter, but I am certain that if I met you I could put our point of view to you in a way that, although you might not agree, you would at least understand.

"It takes all sorts to make a world, and we have to try to cater for an immense variety of interests. We get large numbers of letters from our readers who give us their views and from the general average of these we try to mould the paper.

"Some people are not interested in sport. They therefore think that we should delete sport from the paper. Others accuse us of being too flippant; others of being too heavy and political. We have to try to reach a general balance which will be most acceptable to all readers.

"One thing I am certain of, and that is the responsibility of producing a newspaper is a great one, that it has a duty other than merely to entertain. But this is a matter upon which people will differ for all time, and as I say, we try to strike the mean.

Yours faithfully, etc."

The Reader replies.

"DEAR SIR,—I thank you for your letter of the 3rd instant, replying to mine of September 28, and would like to clarify one or two points before terminating the correspondence.

"You mention that it takes all sorts to make a world and that you try to mould your paper from the general average of the large numbers of letters from readers and I appreciate your remarks that 'some people are not interested in sport and therefore think that sport should be deleted from the paper.' In case you imagined from my protest against continuance of the 'Saturday Thought' that I wished all religious matter to be discontinued, I hasten to point out my desire to be tolerant as indicated in the second paragraph of my letter.

"Although it would be absurd to delete, say, sports items from your paper, you would no doubt be the first to admit that the subject matter should be of the highest quality, free from avoidable inaccuracies and undue bias. If so, I absolutely fail to see why the same method of selection and editing should not apply in the case of religious articles, or are reverend gentlemen so other-worldly and above reproof that we ordinary mortals (including newspaper editors) dare not criticise?

"Of course it may be admitted that if, in the light of modern thought and knowledge, religious articles were edited (or blue-pencilled) at all severely, there would be very little subject matter left. Even so, surely our clerics have not yet come to the end of their ability to ring the changes on the old platitudes, that you have to accept all and sundry articles. I find it difficult to believe that you or any of your representatives or colleagues, accustomed as you must be to the realities of this world, can willingly pass contributions such as the 'Saturday Thought', Nos. 2 and 3, practically every sentence of which can be disputed or denied. A similar display of editing (or the lack of it) in a sports page would, I believe, soon bring its aftermath.

"I trust you will not take the foregoing as the outpourings of a hurt Atheist, I merely wish to add my small voice to the 'general average' so that my quota of influence may help to 'mould the paper.' Who knows, perhaps one day when the futile and monotonous bleatings of the orthodox religionists have revealed themselves for what they are, to a more intelligent and thoughtful public, we may see published, or even broadcast, opposing or Atheistic arguments just as most points of view are nowadays permitted in all other walks of life, especially where truth is sought without fear of the consequences.

Yours faithfully, etc."

[And there the matter ends. The love of our Press for a selected freedom, also a unique one, remains untouched.—
Editor, "The Freethinker."]

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