

# THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Religion of Sensible Men

"MY religion," said the great Lord Chesterfield, "is that of all sensible men." "What is that?" came the natural question. "Sensible men never tell," was the illuminating or not illuminating reply—it depends entirely upon the point of view. It is a long time since this confession was made, but Chesterfield's intellectual progeny still flourishes. Nowadays, they do not always decline to say what their religion is, very often they make a vague declaration of religious belief in something or the other, but they resemble Lord Chesterfield in concluding that religion is the one thing on which frank speech and fearless thought are least desirable. And one feels that if all sensible men could be induced to say exactly what they thought about religion, we should probably find the number of sensible men large enough to do away with the necessity of even timid ones sinking sense before the folly of fools.

### Religion and Reticence

No other subject in the world carries with it so much intellectual insincerity as does religion. In society it is counted bad form to introduce religion into general conversation. In cultured circles expressions such as "Thank God" or "by God's help" are permissible, and at the other end of the social scale one meets with "Gor Blimey" or "Gawd's strewth," but a sober discussion of religious beliefs is counted bad taste, and is almost certain to lead to ill-feeling. Almost any other subject may be discussed without danger to the amenities, but religion is taboo. And yet it is, if we may trust a general profession, the most important subject of all. That a man must have a religion of some sort is one of the canons of respectable society, but he ought not to talk about it. If people did talk about it, they would disagree; and disagreement might disclose the fact that a large number of people only agree to believe in religion so long as they are not clearly aware of what it is in which they profess to believe.

### The Consequence of Silence

Now this disinclination to talk about religion seems to me to point to two things. First, there is little genuine religious conviction to talk about. If the majority of people really believed in religion, if it were an active force in their lives they would not hesitate to talk about it. Take any earlier period of our history you please and you will find that while there is a genuine conviction as to the reality and value of religion there is plenty of talk about it. It crops up in discussions on politics, on art, on literature, and emerges in everything which man undertakes. The early Puritans tried to regulate life by religion because they believed in it. Knox in Scotland, Calvin in

Geneva, and the Pilgrim Fathers in America all illustrate the same truth. The trouble then was not to get people to talk about religion, the difficulty was to get them to keep other subjects clear of religion. If things are different now it is because there is less belief, because even Christians realise that religious belief has no vital connection with the general welfare. Curiously enough, it is the unbeliever who is now most ready to talk about religion, and his readiness is due, not to his belief in its value, but to a conviction that the sooner it is cleared away as so much mental lumber the better. There is little doubt that if clear thinking and plain speaking were general, Freethought would be found to have one of the largest followings in the country. Under present conditions, we sacrifice conviction to comfort, and by a boundless dissimulation, cultivate hypocrisy until it becomes a second nature.

### The Price of Conformity

The second and more obvious inference from this reticence to speak plainly on matters of religion, is that punishment of some sort is still likely to be the result. I do not believe that many people are so built that they prefer dissimulation. On the other hand, it is only the few who will tell the truth if its telling involves punishment or discomfort. Make the results of plain speech unpleasant and the result is concealment, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. So it happens that having had for centuries the prison, the torture-chamber, and the hundred and one petty punishments of social life before them for plain speaking in matters of religion, the English people have come to the point of regarding it as part of the normal order of things not to be straightforward on questions of religious belief. "No one," said Chesterfield, "should communicate ideas which would trouble the peace of society." And that is exactly the advice one meets with nowadays. What a satire upon human nature is such advice! What a condemnation of the influence of Christianity! People may not be honest for fear they will disturb the peace of society. The bigot and the knave lay down the rules, and better men are content to play the game at their bidding. Who was it said that Christianity was a religion invented by fools for the benefit of knaves? Whoever it was had certainly got hold of a vital truth. For one consequence of Christian dominance has been to provide a plentiful supply of both varieties.

### Honouring the Bigot

So much for the Chesterfieldian advice to "sensible" men. The term is inept. Those who follow it may be cautious or timid, but they can rarely, with truth, be called sensible. If they escape persecution and advance themselves socially there must always remain a galling sense of personal servitude that will be hard to bear. It is not



alone the effect on oneself; there is also the effect on one's fellows. The man who practises intellectual reticence himself is inviting others to follow a similar policy. Why should A be more outspoken than B? If it is the wiser policy for one why not for the other? If I know that my profession of religion masks a lie, how can I be sure that someone else's profession expresses the truth? Why should we continue to thus pay homage at the shrine of ignorance and bigotry? It may be said that bigotry is strong and in a position to make its strength felt. Quite so; but how much of that strength is fictitious? I believe that a large part of the strength of religion in this country is due to the timidity of those who are not religious at all. Bigotry is by nature cowardly, but there is small wonder that it acts with the decision which belongs of right to real courage when it finds its commands treated with so much consideration. And surely there is no reason in the nature of things why a lie should be paid exaggerated respect because of its antiquity. The right to freely express heresy will be conceded only when the heretic is strong enough to take that right for granted. Nor need one become either a fanatic or a bully to master the art of expressing opinions without reserve whenever the opportunity permits it being done.

### Our Need of Courage

It is all very well talking glibly about teaching people to think. There is plenty of thinking in the world, and plenty of Freethinking too. Our real need is for thought with courage at the back of it. We have scores of politicians, men of science, and men of letters, who are certainly Freethinkers, and who yet keep their opinions on religion to themselves, or voice them only in the company of selected friends. In religion and politics alike the air is saturated with timidity, and in consequence with insincerity. And as few work on the plan of saying all they really believe, no one seems quite certain that they believe all they say. Thus the rule that "sensible" men never tell their opinions on religion only too often ends with their not having opinions worth bothering about. Bigotry cows them during life, and often sets the final seal upon its triumph by perpetuating its mummeries over their dead bodies.

Meanwhile, those who do not believe in Lord Chesterfield's rule pay a heavier price than needs be for their disobedience. The burden of propaganda which would be comparatively light if shared by all, becomes often unbearably heavy because so few have the courage to speak out. The rest are overawed by pasteboard fortresses and dummy guns. The strength of religion is to-day largely due to the weakness of Freethinkers. And there is one thing certain. If Freethinkers desire the respect of the religious world they must show themselves strong enough to command it. There is only one way of getting the world to respect an opinion, and that is by those who hold it leading the way. So long as Freethought opinions are hidden, so long as heresy is put forward by heretics with an apologetic air, so long it will be easy to treat Freethinkers with contempt. Intellectual sincerity and courage alone will ever make Freethought a real force in the country, and there was never greater need for these qualities in our life than there is to-day.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE CONVERSION OF NEWMAN

### II.

ONE has only to go through the "Apologia" to see how Kingsley's charge of intellectual dishonesty cut Newman to the very soul. It is said that he wrote his book in seven weeks, "constantly in tears, and constantly crying out with distress." And master of English prose as he was, full of righteous indignation, and knowing in his own heart that he, Newman, at least never lied, he said clearly and unequivocally:—

"I scorn and detest lying, and quibbling, and double-tongued practice, and slyness and cunning and smoothness and cant, and pretence, quite as much as any Protestants hate them . . ."

Of course. And no doubt that would be the reply of nearly any Jesuit—though some of us might feel that in the very act of saying it he might be thinking how he could do the opposite of his vehement protestation. This was how Kingsley felt, and he said so defiantly. He could not trust Father Newman—no matter what Newman said or how hurt he was at such "a base and cruel" attack.

In his essay on Manning, Lytton Strachey shows that the whole question of Newman's "honesty" is not quite as simple as its face value. For example:—

"Kingsley was a stout Protestant, whose hatred of Popery was, at bottom, simply ethical—an honest, instinctive horror of the practices of priestcraft and the habits of superstition; and it was only natural that he should see in those innumerable delicate distinctions which Newman was perpetually drawing, and which he himself had not only never thought of, but could not even grasp, simply another manifestation of the inherent falsehood of Rome . . ."

Strachey agrees that the very idea of falsehood was abhorrent to Newman and that "it was owing to his very desire to explain what he had in his mind exactly and completely with all the refinements of which his subtle brain was capable that persons such as Kingsley were puzzled into thinking him dishonest." And so the question must be put—was Newman, without knowing it, "dishonest"? Or one can pose the problem in another way. Is a convert to Rome such because he passionately believes in truth and truth only for its own sake?

"A man may be," says Strachey, "of a scrupulous and impeccable honesty, and yet his respect for the truth—it cannot be denied—may be insufficient." For it is evident that the "possibilities of truth and falsehood depend upon other things besides sincerity."

The fact is, Newman was incapable of sifting evidence where religion was concerned, and he would have been angry with anyone, let alone Kingsley, if this had been pressed when it came to believing in miracles. He believed in the liquefaction of St. Januarius's blood, and claims that he saw the blood of St. Patrizia and an Oratorian Father who died two centuries previously liquefying in his presence. He believed in the house of the Holy Family which had been transported from Palestine to Loreto in Italy in three hops, because everyone believed in it at Rome. "I have no antecedent difficulty in the matter," he said. And when it came to English saints, Newman equally believed that "St. Ninian had turned a staff into a tree, that St. Germain had stopped a cock from crowing, and that a child had been raised from the dead to convert St. Helier."

But of course it was not for his belief in miracles, and in the superstitious and childish stories surrounding his beloved saints, that Newman was attacked. As he says himself it was because he had been for years in the Church of England, thought to be "a Romanist wearing the Protestant livery"—"doing the



work of a hostile Church in the bosom of the English establishment and knew it, or ought to have known it."

But Newman was never a "Protestant"—a name that he, like so many Anglo-Catholics, "scouted." He believed in a Church Catholic and many of the years of his early life were devoted to show that this was the Church of England. But the longer he studied the question, the more he became confused on the issue. "His "Apologia" is a veritable apology for never knowing where he exactly stood. And rightly or wrongly, even after he was "converted," at least some of his contemporaries found him just as confused. His famous Tract No. 90, which tried to interpret the Articles so as to harmonise with "Catholicism"—whatever Newman meant by that term—bewildered most people. "Even my own bishop," he says pathetically, "has said that my mode of interpreting the Articles makes them mean anything or nothing." And his own bewilderment increased so that even just before 1841 he could write that he "was very nearly a pure Protestant."

For years, Newman wrote against the Catholic Church, and in a letter he wrote to Keble in 1840 he says that the "arguments which I have published against Romanism seem to myself as cogent as ever" yet—yet—he always had a doubt, he was always bewildered. And in the end, though he still was an Anglican, he felt it his duty to give up his curacy.

The difficulty with Newman as exemplified in his "Apologia" is that he is constantly changing his mind and his opinions, and putting forward at the same time rigid, logical disquisitions as to why he is right and nobody ought to object. Over and over again I have marked passages I wanted to deal with only to find later a perfectly "honest" argument in which he reverses what he had already contended for. His letters to his friends are perfect marvels of disingenuousness. They are frank, open and "true," but for the life of me I cannot see—to use American parlance—how he got away with them. Here is a passage from the "Apologia" which is worth transcribing:—

"How could I ever hope to make them believe in a second theology, when I had cheated them in the first? With what face could I publish a new edition of a dogmatic creed, and ask them to receive it as gospel? Would it not be plain to them that no certainty was to be found anywhere? Well, in my defence I could only make a lame apology; however, it was the true one, viz., that I had not read the Fathers cautiously enough; that in such nice points, as those which determine the angle of divergence between the two Churches, I had made considerable miscalculations. But how came this about? Why the fact was, unpleasant as it was to avow, that I had leaned too much upon the assertions of Ussher, Jeremy Taylor, or Barrow and had been deceived by them. Valeat quantum—it was all that could be said."

But some of us perhaps do not think it is all that can be said now. For here we have Newman, after telling his readers and his fellow Anglican believers for many years, that the Fathers said this or that in proof of one of his most subtle theological points on the Articles, or on Doctrinal Development, or on Miracles, now telling us that in reality he was deceived! Of course, quite honestly deceived—it really was not his fault, it was the fault of Ussher or Taylor or Barrow. It seems to me that Kingsley must have allowed a wry smile to pass across his face when he read that passage—among many other similar ones.

The real point to note is that Newman is quite sincere in his apology, and must have believed that such a confession proved the honesty of his opinions. So far, so good. We are all liable to make mistakes, we poor laymen. But this was the great Dr. Newman, the greatest Anglican of his day—surely one would have expected that he of all men would have gone direct to his Church Fathers and not to interpretations or even citations by later theologians? And it was not Newman naturally who could be blamed. It was Ussher and Taylor and Barrow.

I have pointed out how little Newman was trusted by many Catholics even after his conversion. And it will prove instructive to see how he deals with one or two of the dogmas of his second love. One can see how even in his most famous work, his "Apologia," he wanted to believe and said he believed—yet his trained logical mind simply could not.

H. CUTNER.

## SENSE AND NONSENSE

WHEN Frazer suggested that magic was "the savage equivalent of science," he started something. But the difference between magic and science is too great for a parallel to be drawn. His idea of the relationship of magic and religion was equally false. The mistakes arose from his approach to the subject. Trying to explain magic practices in terms of beliefs is like assuming that the savage is capable of abstract thinking. It is like trying to imagine the savage imagining an imaginary being. This is both illogical and unnecessary. The beliefs arise as a consequence of a sequence of events and can be related to the various stages of social development, and further, this also corresponds to the development of language.

Magic and science are separated by thousands of years of social development. In considering this process as the development of language, we not only connect the two, but we do so in a way that enables us to see the difference, while relating them to both the sociological and psychological development at the same time.

The yelling and murmuring of savages is like the barking and snarling of dogs. It is an expression of emotion and desire. But our primitive language became descriptive in becoming mimetic. Like the dog, man gains confidence from the sound of his own voice; he also gains in the feeling of power in the strength of his own gestures. The imitative characteristic is further developed in the use of inscriptions, with which, becoming conditioned reflex, the emotions and desires are associated. But in the gesture the emotions are more definitely expressed. In this primitive language there is also a repetition and rhythmic intonation. This is considered to be, like rhythm and rhyme in poetry and folklore, and aid to memory. This rhythmic repetition of sounds, and the use of inscriptions or images is the constant accompaniment of all activity. Even to-day, among more primitive peoples, we observe this chanting and singing in rhythmic movement accompanying even everyday work. And the same has been noted as late as ancient Babylon. Nothing whatever was done, hunting, fighting, sowing, harvesting, trading, but what it was accompanied by magic incantations. It was as constant as our thoughts, and in sober fact, it was thinking. It was in the childhood of the race that man learned to think and magic was his way of thinking.

Just as we teach children, by dint of constant repetition to associate words with things and actions; by repetition to learn the alphabet, or multiplication table, so it was with our savage ancestors. By this means their reactions became conditioned reflex. And the constant babble and chatter among primitive types of people is like the constant babble among children. It is behaviouristic thinking, they were talking to themselves, in expressing their desires.

But our primitive ancestors had no parent to correct and educate them, the savage learned in the bitter school of experience; he suffered for his mistakes. The story of the early development of mankind is a complete denunciation of the canting humbug about God being a loving father who cares for his children. The only correction came from experience and it is we who have learned from their mistakes, through the medium of language, the social memory.

A. B.



## ACID DROPS

Thanks to our friends in Canada we get much information as to the kind of freedom that rules when the churches are strong. Major-General Chishom—who besides being a good soldier is also a man of scientific attainments—has been appointed Deputy Minister of Health of Montreal. Now the general might have been as great a humbug as religion tends to make men in a civilised centre, but he has been rash enough to say what he thinks about some of the Christian bodies with the result that different religious people are now clamouring for the discharge of a man who in a Christian community tells the truth. Here is a sample from bulk. Bishop Wells, a Protestant, supports the Movement for the Major-General's discharge, and says that "a man holding a position of national importance in a Christian country should keep quiet about his peculiar fancies." That is good, well-established Christian ethics. Be as big a liar or humbug as is possible and the Churches of God will wink a Christian eye. But be honest in word and deed, and real Christianity comes to the front.

The "Church Times" is now quite certain that the old materialism, the "old prosaic and negative scholarship" of a generation ago, is almost dead. The Bible "is coming into its own again," and people are beginning "to have a healthier respect for its testimony." Such a story, for example, as that of the Three Wise Men of the East following the Star of Bethlehem is now seen to be "intrinsically" probable. These Three Wise Men were in reality scientists as well as kings, we are confidently told, and obviously a story vouched for by scientists, who are also kings, must be true. The "Church Times" seems to be borrowing a little from the "Tablet" and the "Universe," though they do it, we think, much better. However, this is a free country and anybody is at liberty to believe what he chooses. And so we ask, what is the difference between the most uproarious story in "Alice in Wonderland" and that of the Three Wise Men?

It is curiously significant that a word such as "Clericalism" should be a word of ill omen mostly to laymen, and which the clergy—of all denominations—do not care to use in public. Yet the meaning of the term is plain and cannot be juggled with as can so many terms in connection with religion. Here, for instance, are two definitions taken from first-class dictionaries. The first runs, "The principle or policy of clerical control over education, marriage, laws, public charities, etc." The second is, "A state of mind favourable to domination of the clergy." It will be seen that the essential significance of "Clericalism" is concerned with gaining power and control over the fundamental forces of social life—and much of this power might be spelt "Wealth." But it is one of the plainest features of the Roman Church that it stands at the top of the scale for greed in piling up wealth and a determination for ruling the secular life of a people.

But this is the way in which the Catholic Church ("the great lying Church," as Heine called it) deals with the matter through the medium of the "Universe":—

"If 'Clericalism' means the interference by the clergy in the political affairs of the State, then the (Catholic) Church condemns 'Clericalism.'"

But the Catholic Church has never refrained from interfering with any secular State that acts contrary to the interests of the Church. It has excommunicated the whole of a State bodily when it threatened the interests of the Church. This is so glaringly the case that the "Universe" gives the lie to its own previous statement that, "If the Secular State officially professes and applies a materialistic and Atheistic philosophy, or refuses to be subject to any moral authority higher than itself," then it must be condemned. We thank the "Universe" for giving us so complete an example of Roman Catholic dishonesty.

By way of summing up we may point out that the Catholic Church claims the right to say what kind of education should be given by the State; it demands the right to say what people should believe in matters of religion; it also claims the right to

dictate to the State the form of a marriage contract, and, of course, there is the right of the Church to suppress anything that runs against the teachings of the Church. These conditions being conceded the Church believes in freedom of everybody and everything. "The great lying Church."

The Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church, Greenock, says that he will not marry, baptise or bury anyone who cannot prove that their "church-going is good." We are not sure how the law runs in Scotland, but in England he could be legally forced to either carry out his functions or resign. But what a beautiful place the world would be if Christian ministers had their way. Still, if people are foolish enough to look up to the pulpit, such parsons as the one at Greenock will flourish.

There is every prospect that the Roman Church will lose heavily as a consequence of the war. It played against Russia as much as it could, but it failed, and it is never likely to put Christianity in the position it had under Tsarism. Of course, among the vast population of Russia the Churches—so long as they do not interfere as Churches with the Secular life of the country—will be permitted to go their own way. That has been the position of the Russian Government ever since the revolution was made secure. Then in addition to Russia there are the minor States that will look to Russia for some form of security and help. But from each of these minor States, the Church cannot but lose ground. In Italy, too, there should be further developments in the direction of Freethought. How deep the development of Freethought will go no one can say, but some increase is inevitable.

The Czech problem is also to be considered. The Government has been trying to secularise the Catholic schools of Bohemia and Moravia but the Catholics have prevented the attempt going further—for the present. In Slovakia, the Government was more successful and "lay" teachers are now in control. But by hook or by crook we may trust the Church to strive its damndest to secure control. More than any other branch of Christianity the Catholic Church realises that if the children escape the priest there are small chances of them growing up to be "good Christians."

This is the way in which one of our religious weekly papers explains the religious conception of marriage and divorce:—

"The Christian law of marriage was not instituted by our Lord as something new. He claims for it that it was so 'from the beginning' when 'male and female created He them.'"

That is very definite. When God made Adam and Eve, at the beginning, he intended there should be no divorce, and although in these days of evolution we are told that man and woman came into existence rather late in the day, and no one can say when the developing animal became man or woman, still it must be accepted that God then laid down the Church law of marriage, because it was endorsed by a celibate preacher some two thousand years ago. But as according to the same "blessed book" if Adam and Eve had not broken the divine law there might never have been an opportunity for Adam to divorce Eve, it looks as though the condition of keeping one "divine law" was that another "divine law" had to be broken. The case looks puzzling, particularly as the chief God in this religious medley later gave instructions that if a man's wife did not find favour in his eyes he might give her a "bill of divorcement" and send her about her business. Anyway, between the one and the other, we must assume that the conditions of married life were fixed for ever, a long, long time ago, by a God who was a wifeless husband with a son the same age as himself. In the name of God we must accept it, although what the devil it all means is rather puzzling.

The Emperor of Japan has solemnly informed the world that he is no longer a god. Well, he is not the first god by a very long shot who has faded out of life and even of history. But generally the gods die from some form of creeping paralysis. The Japanese god prefers to commit hara-kiri. We admire his courage. The Christian God has to stand by and watch himself being divested of one position after another until he shrinks into sheer nothingness.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C.1.  
Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

**BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.**—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: A. Rogerson, 13s. 6d.; Mrs. Amy Cross, £2. The acknowledgement last week of J. W. H. Davis, 5s. should have been 10s.

For "The Freethinker."—T. Green, 20s.

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*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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## SUGAR PLUMS

There is a monthly Christian pamphlet with the title of "Emergency," which can be bought at 50 copies for 2s. 6d. It is published by the Paternoster Press, Fleet Street. In number five there is a story that will be recognised as a thoroughly Christian effort. Here it is. Colonel Ingersoll was announced as about to lecture on "The Foundation of the Christian Faith." But there was a man who was a drunkard, neglected his family, etc., etc. Then he made acquaintance with Jesus, and his life was transformed. He wrote to Ingersoll and explained what Jesus had done for him. He had transformed him. And Ingersoll came on the platform and said he had nothing to say against a religion that could do this. "No man has ever dared to point his finger at the character of Jesus." We understand from other quarters that this is not exactly true. The real story was that Jesus came to the man in a vision and explained to him that the beer nowadays was not worth drinking, and the man cried aloud his thanks and drank no more.

Naturally we get complaints, from new readers mostly, concerning this journal. We daresay that on a first reading one who has been saturated with religion feels rather afraid that we are brutal in our onslaught, and to a great many scientific truth comes with something of a shock. To them we can only say that without the shock, a great many would never reach complete freedom of mind. When a surgeon finds that the cutting off of a leg is essential to health, it would be criminal on his part to take off the limb in small pieces monthly. Truth always shocks those who have pinned themselves to falsehood. Truth is often a very brutal thing; it justifies itself in the better life that it produces.

But when we get a long rigmarole that we are not "dignified," our retort is that dignity is generally the stock in trade of fools, and an easy escape for rogues. Beware of the man who thinks mainly of his dignity; you can be sure that there is either folly or roguery in the offing. The man who does not understand the origin and quality of religion finds he is upholding religion with the stubbornness of a donkey, and the anger of threatened privileges and dishonest profits. The Christian admired the firmness of Jesus when he whipped the money lenders out of the temple. It is now the task of the honest Atheist to whip the fooleries of modern religion out of existence.

Belfast readers are reminded that Mr. J. T. Brighton will speak in the Grand Central Hotel (Londonderry Room) Belfast, this evening at 7.30, on "Man—Whence—Whither?" It is Mr. Brighton's first visit to Belfast and his enthusiasm and hard work for the movement in England should serve as a good introduction to his Irish audience.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti will visit Newcastle-on-Tyne next Sunday, January 27, and speak in the Socialist Hall, Old Arcade, Pilgrim Street, on "God and the Atomic Bomb." The meeting commences at 7 p.m.; at 5 o'clock, same afternoon, a tea and welcome to Mr. Rosetti will be held at the Odeon Cafe, Northumberland Street, Newcastle. The total number to be catered for must reach the Odeon management some days ahead, so will those wishing to be present notify Mr. J. T. Brighton, 23, Browns Buildings, Chester-le-Street, as soon as possible. The social gathering in the afternoon and meeting in the evening should make a pleasant and useful Sunday.

The Rev. Mr. Ashby writing in the "Daily Telegraph" says you will not find God "by intellectual search; we may vex our minds endlessly only to find in the end that we have found no pathway towards Him." We agree, but we are afraid he does not quite understand what he is saying. If we are to find God reasonably we must exercise our minds. What Mr. Ashby is saying is that the more intelligence we have, the greater wisdom we attain on the question of God, the less chance is there of our believing in Him. And with that we agree heartily. Mr. Ashby reaches the high point of settlement when he says: "If instead of fruitlessly puzzling our intellects . . . we listen to our Lord . . . we shall perhaps begin to make an astonishing discovery." We will leave the Reverend Ashby at this point.

But may we add something that was written by a well-known American that goes well with Mr. Ashby's appeal. It runs with all the frankness that one often meets in American writings:—

"Too many people presume that they are full of the grace of God when they are only bilious; that they are pious because they dislike to see other people enjoy themselves; that they are Christians because they conform to certain creeds, just as many men may imagine themselves honest because they obey the laws of the land—for the purpose of keeping out of the penitentiary. They put up long prayers on Sunday; that's piety. They bamboozle a green gosling out of his birthright on Monday; that's business. They even acquire two voices—a brisk business accent and a Sunday whine that would make a wolf climb a tree. I am always suspicious of a man's piety when it makes him look as though he had cut a throat or scuttled a ship, and was praying for a commutation of the death sentence."

## POPE JOAN

### How to Think of "Pope Joan"

FR. HUGH POPE has found some further evidence that the story of the apocryphal Pope Joan was first put into circulation late in the thirteenth century by the friars, who were at loggerheads with Boniface VIII.; and he has found an account of her inserted in a Dominican's Chronicle of emperors and popes, down to 1300.

The "Nuremberg Chronicle" of 1493 gave a wider currency to the tale, just in time for the German reformers. But the medieval writers merely treated the episode as a short tactical success on the part of the Devil; which was a much more robust and sensible way of looking at scandals than that more modern point of view which lets scandals triumph all too completely, and says, "I would love to believe in the Divine Institution of the Papacy, but the life of Alexander VI. will not let me."



## HEAVEN OR EARTH?

"Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things."

—SWINBURNE.

"BEWARE that thou forget not the Lord thy God" (Deuteronomy viii. 11) is a text which always amuses me. For we are given very little opportunity to forget the Almighty! These precise words are prominently displayed on large posters, issued under the auspices of a Scripture Text Society, wherever one seems to go; churches certainly cannot be avoided, and most of them advertise their god on notice boards. Many of the daily and week-end newspapers print sermons or religious articles in His praise, while the B.B.C. never allows a day to pass without Christian broadcasts of some kind, and satiates us with them on the Sabbath. Every schoolday starts with a prayer, so does each session of Parliament. Even the Sunday filmgoer may have to endure a short religious interlude with some such title as the "Signpost."

Yet, whilst this is amusing in one sense, it should be extremely distressing to those people who concern themselves with human welfare. They have only to think of the incalculable waste of men's time, wealth and energy in religious pursuits, to realise what a curse the gods have been to humanity. State-established and nonconformist churches, Salvation Army and the like, annually receive large sums of money from the State or by begging. At the present time, many appeals are being made towards the cost of rebuilding blitzed churches in order that the old, old fraud may be perpetuated: the fraud of concentrating man's attention on an unknown "higher" realm, in the hopes that he will thereby disdain the fruits and pleasures of this life.

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians iii. 2) expresses the very essence of Christian teaching: the teaching that has condoned every social evil from slavery to poverty. Insidious propaganda along these lines is met with continually, in and out of the churches, camouflaged in all sorts of ways. Probably the commonest cry is that "Man shall not live by bread alone," which is undoubtedly true, though I question the efficacy of "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew iv. 4) as an alternative diet. Be that as it may, the equally important axiom that man cannot live without bread, is nearly always overlooked.

Then we are warned against the "gross materialism" of the age, and advised to seek "spiritual" ends, whatever the expression may mean! We are told, too, that men would give themselves solely to sensual pleasures—"the lust of the flesh," etc.—if they did not believe in an after life; and, worst of all, that suffering is good for us.

Well, personally, I am sufficiently hedonistic to agree with the sentiments of Omar Khayyám:—

"Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,  
Before we too into the Dust descend;  
Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,  
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans End!"

—though individual conceptions of pleasure will, of course, vary a great deal.

On the other hand, I condemn completely the Christian teaching of the blessedness of poverty and suffering. The Church has always emphasised that "the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew viii. 20), His sufferings are the central pillar of Christianity—the purifying of sinful mankind—and we are asked to "rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter iv. 13). The idea that those who are poor or hungry or who weep now, should endure their hardships so that their "reward is great in heaven," and that the fortunate ones, here, will then be woeful (Luke vi. 20-25)

is one of the most harmful that I know. Yet this sermon is persistently presented to us as the finest guide to human conduct, extant!

It is surely time that man ceased looking towards the skies for help in combating the difficulties of life. Time, also, that he dispensed with the army of priests and parsons who profess to be God's chosen representatives upon the earth. It should be obvious to all that man's prayers to the heavens have been fruitless, and that his offerings to the churches have likewise yielded naught of real value. So-called "spiritual consolation" he may have received, but that is only another name for resignation or mental torpidity.

Is it not fantastic that he should pray for the success of his harvest, and yet use every modern device to guard against bad weather and to improve poor soil? . . . that he should give thanks to God for a bountiful crop, when it is science and hard work that has ensured this? How can he reconcile petitions for help from the deity, in times of war, with continued work on ever-more-deadly weapons without which he knows he must fall a victim to those of the enemy?

He cannot possibly make such a reconciliation if he approaches the matter logically, and it is the task of the Secularist to urge him to do this. To point out the blatant inconsistencies and anachronisms of a belief in God, in the modern world. (Man, to-day, has no need for the gods: all the accomplishments of the race have been entirely without divine assistance. "God helps those who help themselves" is merely a reflection of the fact that human labour, and human labour alone, is responsible for progress.

Without that labour, that endeavour, progress would cease. That is the reason why it is so important that time and energy should not be spent on building or rebuilding edifices to the imaginary demiurge, and that money should not be thrown away in keeping His black-clothed emissaries in their parasitical positions. Now, once and for all time, we should concentrate upon Man, instead of upon God. The latter has had far too much attention: the former too little. It is possible to more than adequately clothe, feed and shelter the whole of the world's populace, and it is a social crime that we do not do so. The City of Liverpool is proud of two Cathedrals (one Church of England and the other Roman Catholic) constructed or in the course of construction, each costing great sums of money, while many Liverpool children run about half-clothed and half-fed, and then return to hovel-like dwellings not deserving of the term "home." The same thing is true throughout the world.

We should not permit this any longer. Instead of chattering about the Fatherhood of God, we should work to realise the Brotherhood of Man; cultivate human fellowship not that of a holy ghost. "The world is my country, and to do good, my religion," said Thomas Paine, and it is a motto well worth adopting. It is essentially a secular motto, leaving the new world to take care of itself. That is how it should be, for there is more than enough to occupy our minds and bodies doing "good" upon this planet.

Instead of erecting costly cathedrals and churches, we should build more and better homes, schools, art galleries, libraries, museums and other places of culture. Instead of financing the churches we should endow the hospitals. Instead of huge cemeteries to the dead we could have parks for the living. These and many other improvements are well within our power. Our thing above all others stands in the way of a finer, saner, better world: religion. For a sane outlook is necessary in order to make a sane world, and religion is based on fear and ignorance. It offers men the clouds when it is the earth that they really require—and deserve. It promises an endless bliss to come, as a sop for unhappiness now. Emile Zola rightly said that



"Civilisation will not attain to its perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest!" The Secularist, then, has the interests of humanity at heart when he attacks religion. He would like to see a real civilisation in the not-too-distant future.

C. McCALL.

## INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE

IT is evident that many of the religiously-minded public, being dissatisfied with the old established Gospel Shops are disposed to transfer their custom to new firms.

Christian Science and the Jehovah Witness Movement seem to be doing a flourishing business, greatly to the disgust of their older rivals who hate them bitterly for being such dangerous competitors. The point of interest to us is that the new as well as the old firms depend upon the Bible for their existence. As soon as the fallibility of that work is generally known, both lots will go into bankruptcy.

For above two hundred years, critics have subjected the Bible to severe attacks. The earlier ones directed attention to the fact that the book is replete with inconsistent statements, gross absurdities, and low morality, whilst the later ones have traced the composition of the work, and thus exposed the ignorance and the deceitfulness of its authors. But these exposures and discoveries, though well enough known to students, have never been allowed to reach the general public. The clergy suppress them from fear of imperilling their livelihood, and many well-to-do laymen (no small number of whom perceive the defects of the Bible) practise the same suppression being convinced that it tends to preserve their privileges. The last mentioned fact explains why the belauded Wilberforce opposed the education of the poor, and why the late Archbishop of Canterbury desired to have the State schools "saturated with religion." As regards our high principled, free, and enlightened Press, its silence about the decayed reputation of the Bible, and its readiness to impede that decay by subdolous methods, are truly remarkable. From the Conservative section, this conduct, however blameworthy, is not surprising; but, that organs professedly supporting the interests of the commonality should take such a course excites wonder mingled with disgust. They never make the slightest attempt to inform the people about the advances of Biblical knowledge; and, what is more, so far from combating the various forms of superstition rife in this country, they never omit an opportunity of regaling their subscribers with stories of haunted houses, and other manifestations of the miraculous. Is it that they fear to give offence by attacking the foolish beliefs of their readers and advertisers, or are they apprehensive lest their political opponents should accuse them of promoting infidelity or some similar bugbear?

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE CHURCH AND THE PEOPLE.

SIR,—The paragraph in "Sugar Plums" reporting the success of Tees-side Branch in preventing rate-free churches being used for entertainments to which admission was charged, calls attention to the privileged position of religious organisations in Britain.

In Glasgow there are 209 churches of the Church of Scotland, 79 R.C. chapels and hundreds belonging to other denominations. All of these carry on some kind of social activity.

In contrast, I only know of one Workingmen's Club, so it can be seen that outside the churches there is no social life of any consequence.

The position of those who have left the Church is that they are cut off from any form of social life, a position which is very pleasing to the clergy.

Were the privileges of rate exemption extended to include all buildings used for social or cultural purposes, life in this clergy-ridden town would become a little more tolerable.

Alongside all this frustration of social life the worst kind of hooliganism and ignorance flourishes, and will continue to do so unless steps are taken to direct the energy of youth into social and cultural activities. This can only be done by the creation of more social clubs enjoying the same privileges as religious organisations.

Are there any M.P.s courageous enough to champion this cause?—Yours, etc.,

J. BUCHANAN.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### Report of Executive Meeting held January 3, 1946

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Horowitz, Morris, Page, Barker, Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Bradford, Manchester, Birmingham, and the Parent Society. Decisions were given concerning items of administration in the Chapman-India Estate. Delegates report of meetings of the World Union of Freethinkers London Committee was read, discussed and approved. Reports of meetings held and future arrangements were presented and special note was made of excellent work done by the Bradford Branch of the Society. The first notice concerning the Annual Conference for 1946 was ordered to be sent out.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, February 14, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

## 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., H. L. BEALES, M.A.: "Social Imperatives." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., J. S. D. BACON, M.A.: "The Origin of Life."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Grand Central Hotel, Londonderry Room).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: "Man—Whence—Whither?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. HUSSAIN NOOR: "Christian and Atheist."



## "PLAYING WITH WORDS"

### II.

THUS Ab, Aleph, Beth, meaning father, may also be interpreted Bull (of the) House, or Leader (of the) Household. There is thus a poetic allusion to sexual masculinity and to social rank. There is an abundance of this sort of thing in the Hebrew scriptures, sometimes one, sometimes the other interpretation being given. With such a tangle to contend with there can be no doubt that much of the biblical "translation" is sheer guesswork. This confusion was made still worse by the use of the letters of the alphabet as numerals, so that a word might be read as a number or vice versa, and still further these things still retained a superstitious character. This may be seen in the mathematical "philosophy" of Pythagoras. The same sort of thing persists to-day in the "science" of numerology.

The picturesque character of poetic allusion can be plainly seen in the Scriptures, especially in apocalyptic parts, where the analogies are extravagant and even grotesque; obviously symbolical, the metaphor being expanded into allegory. The hopeless uncertainty of any attempt at translation is an indication of the basic fallacy of this type of thinking. But until people could forget the old associations further progress was not possible.

This mystical fantasy was not necessarily or essentially a practice of mental amnesia. For instance, Ezekiel looked up into the heavens and saw wheels, wheels within and wheels without. This is less poetical than the ride of the Valkyries or of Apollo's chariot. It is a more practical pre-geometrical imagery of Ptolemy's epicyclic theory. This indicates the practical difficulties with which these people were faced, and the chief practical difficulty was in the development of language itself. These people had no other than the one they used.

It was through the development of mathematics, with its sequence and consequence, that man found a way out of this morass of uncertainty. Its abstract character is the very type and symbol of the revolutionary change; its very certainty giving it the character of the most powerful kind of magic. The desire to escape from this intellectual confusion and uncertainty, gave rise to a new form of mystical contemplation. The desire to forget produced the characteristic inversion and substitution. These symbols, losing their pictographical character became less intimate, less personal, more remote, more abstract. They lost their direct association and became a medium of verbal expression. Language still retained the essential characteristics of magic. It was still an expression of desire, still an involuntary reaction to these symbols and their associations, still a recognition of similarities. But like the "assumption of the virgin," it was raised to a "higher sphere." In sublimation it became more abstract, more transcendental, in rationalisation it became more complex, more flexible. Striving to escape from a world of images men found themselves in a world of shadows. Like our Joads, they lived in a maze of verbiage; by means of myth and analogy, substituting theological imagery by metaphysical assumptions; to see the unseen, to picture the "things in themselves." The inversion and substitution may be seen in Plato's idealism and the escapism is most plainly seen in the neoplatonism of Plotinus, whose object was the attainment of complete oblivion.

With the language of pictographical similarity, differentiation can only be attained by a multiplicity of, or increased complexity of, symbols. But now language had become more flexible and this increased the possibility of differentiation, which together with mathematics, made for increased definition. Exact definition is dependent upon the development of systems of calculation and mensuration, which together with differentiation by

classification, indicates the social factor. This is shown in the systems of classification and relationship in philosophy. They were the obverse and reverse of the same coin, both demanding obedience and submission to authority. But with the one claiming loyalty, the other faith, the one appealing to hatred, the other to fear, the one glorifying prosperity, the other blessing poverty, the one calling for power, the other for humility.

Caught on the horns of a dilemma man has been "Crucified between two thieves." Man is confused and confounded by a mass of conflicting desires. In striving to overcome one by strengthening another, man uses all the stratagems of war, pretence, exaggeration, misrepresentation and lying, even auto-suggestion and self-deception. Making "Diplomatic gestures," and carrying on a "War of nerves," we perpetuate the mystical methods and ways of thinking, the feelings and sentiments, handed on to us in the language of past generations. Still using the methods of the savage, of the jungle and the wide open spaces, man finds himself in a holocaust of "blood and sweat."

"When thieves fall out, the honest man gets his due." In the struggle between Church and State, men strove to find a way out of this dilemma. They were aided by the new discoveries by the technical development and the accumulation of knowledge. The exchange of ideas was made easier by the invention of printing and the use of a "dead" language avoided confusion. Out of this conflict modern science slowly and painfully emerged. To Aristotle's induction was added Occam's "razor," Galileo's test, Descartes' doubt, Bacon's experiment. In this development we see the emergence of a system of criticism and counter-criticism, check and counter-check, test and experiment, theory and practice, following the age-old method of trial and error; but this time consciously and deliberately, only accepting demonstration as proof.

Science is not an expression of fear but of courage, science does not strive to forget but to remember. To science nothing is sacred, science does not strive to suppress the emotions but to control and to understand them. Science does not strive to avoid consequences but to discover them. Science is not wishful thinking but conscious deliberation. The instruments of science are extensions of the senses, science is as Huxley said "Trained and organised common sense." Science is the direct antithesis of both religion and magic. Science does not strive to exaggerate one desire as against another, but to achieve a balanced judgment. Science is the negation of mysticism, because the mystical conflict of desire is cancelled out in the criticism and counter-criticism. Science is not the negation of logic, but is a development from it. Science is reason in practice. The difference between science and religion, science and magic, is the difference between the conscious and the unconscious, between sense and nonsense.

H. H. PREECE.

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