

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVI.—No. 5

Sunday, February 3, 1946

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### On Finding God

It used to be said by the devout that man's first duty was to get right with God. I could never quite agree with this because it seemed to me that it was God's business to get right with man. After all, even in a very religious period, some men—and women—did get on without God, and all the Godites could do was to threaten them with terrible punishments after they were dead. Whether these threatened punishments materialised or not it is impossible to say with absolute accuracy. On the whole, unbelievers have always got through life at least as comfortably as believers. In fact, it was they who were happy; those with God were notorious for their long faces, and the smiling one lived and smiled—and died. What happened after that no one knows; and nowadays there is a large number of what we may call humane Christians who are rather shy of sending those who acted honestly directly to an eternal hell.

But there are still multitudes of Christians—the larger section, in fact—who are where their great-grandfathers left them. They *move* in the world of to-day, but they live in the world of a few centuries back. And a favourite cry of theirs, given in different ways, is "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Against this the critical unbeliever may say, on the authority of common sense, that it is stupid to spend our time in getting right with God until we are quite sure that there is a God to bother about. And that evidence has never been forthcoming. We get assertions, but no evidence. God's self-appointed representatives build temples in his honour and damn people liberally for not worshipping in them. If getting into the hands of the living God is a serious thing, getting on good terms with him is both troublesome and expensive.

The worst of it all is that no one can make sure that there is a God into whose hands we shall one day fall. Once upon a time, to ask for evidence was to secure severe punishment, and even death. To-day, multitudes of people say openly that there is no evidence that offering prayers to God is more substantial than a feather carried through the air. It may be that the ground rents and the tithes we have paid, the mining royalties that we have given the Churches, the remission of taxes, etc., were not paid to God; it may be that they were just collected for the benefit of the clergy. At most "God" is only an hypothesis. These are considerations. The utmost that good nature can say to the clergy is that their thesis *may* be true, but that admits it may be false. What is really needed to help the clergy is some experiment that would decide the question in definite terms. At any rate, "God," as things stand, is a mere hypothesis that does nothing and settles nothing. The arguments in favour of the existence of God

get steadily weaker and weaker. In the recent war, Field-Marshal Montgomery never ceased assuring the world that he placed his trust in God; but his critics noted that he rarely made an attack on the enemy until he found he had the better of him in men and munitions.

When we began to take part in attacking religion there were in existence some tests—of a sort. There were the wicked Atheists who died screaming for God to pardon them; there were the unbelievers who set God on one side because that made criminality easy. Professor Tyndal had offered his famous chance to pick a hospital without religion and then another hospital with religion but minus medical skill, and then see which reported the greater number of cures. The invitation was never accepted. There was also the alleged case in which Bradlaugh pulled out his watch and challenged God to strike him dead in three minutes. Bradlaugh held the watch aloft for the agreed time, but nothing happened. Why did not God take advantage of either offer? We may be quite sure that it was not because the Christians of that day did not wish to injure Bradlaugh, or because they could not bear to see a number of hospital inmates die in the attempt to prove that God lived. The Christian does not dislike *the test*; what he objects to is any test that is not settled on the other side of the grave. What every good Christian loves is an hypothesis that is advanced without evidence and accepted without verification.

And yet, we must be quite fair with Christians. They have offered what they call "Divine action." There was the famous case of Elijah versus the prophets of Baal, as given in the First Book of Kings. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to call fire from heaven. If Elijah's God produced the fire, he won. If Elijah's God failed, the other lot won. And in the open, in front of a multitude that must have made the place like a first-class football championship, the two set to work—and Elijah won. Why can we not have a test of that kind? The Roman Church produces an annual bunch of miracles, but no one is permitted to be there when the miracles occur, and in such a way that fraud and blundering could be set aside. The only test of God we have—in a serious form—is the taking of an oath where evidence is being given or a business contract is under way. And even the law says, "If you don't wish to make use of a religious oath you can do without." Of course, no one believes that a lying witness will stop lying because he asks God to help him speak the truth. There is not a judge in the country who is foolish enough to believe that religion keeps people from telling lies.

But all this talk of religion, or belief in God, as making men better is almost dead. Hardly anyone really believes it. The days when God ruled the thunder, scattered disease and so on belong to a time that is far away. Times have changed and education has grown. To-day, prodigies are catalogued, not worshipped.

Disinfectants and anti-toxins have displaced saintly relics and pious prayers. In an outbreak of diphtheria we look to the drains, not to divinity. Inoculation is almost compulsory in the Army, but few care a brass button about baptism. Attacks have been made upon the Government for its conduct of the war, but no one—except a few wild parsons—has said that our losses have been due to the anger of God. What, then, is the poor Atheist to do? He would have got on well enough with Elijah; he was ready to submit his hypothesis to experiment. But what is he to do with men who decline to submit their hypothesis to any rational test, who believe in a God who does nothing—and doesn't even do that consistently?

### Dangerous Neutrality

Quite clearly, if the question of God is of the profound importance that theologians say, some sort of a decisive test should be invented and applied. A God who is *everywhere* ought to be located *somewhere*. A God who does everything ought to be occasionally discovered doing something. A God who is all-wise ought not to permit his warmest advocates to be so generally otherwise. A God who is really concerned in his creatures' welfare might have taken a hand in the recent war with advantage. Strict neutrality may be consistent with the functions of a President of the United States; it is quite out of place with the President of the Universe. It is a dangerous policy, too, this neutrality on the part of heaven. If men can get through their present troubles without God, it is possible they may decide on not troubling him any further. And there are signs that the clergy are quite alive to that danger.

### A Serious Position

Although my text comes at the end instead of at the beginning, it has been before me all the time. It was provided by the Archbishop of York, who reminded his hearers the other day that without God the affairs of the nation could not be set right. And I venture to humbly suggest that priority should be given to proving that there is a God to set anything right. Cannot the clergy devise what is called "a control experiment" that would be decisive? No one would welcome it more than the Atheist. The Atheist rejects the God hypothesis because he believes that every hypothesis should do something or explain something; and this particular hypothesis does nothing and explains nothing. The world might even excuse God for not vindicating his government if he would demonstrate his existence. Whatever duties man owes God, this is a duty God owes man. It may be a serious thing, as the Archbishop suggests, to ignore God. We quite believe that His Grace is quite alive to the gravity of that. But it is quite as serious to continue wasting time and energy on what may be no more than an incarnation of primitive ignorance, a personification of human folly.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

While the avowed creed of the enlightened minority is constantly changing under the influence of reflection and inquiry, the real, though unavowed, creed of the mass of mankind appears to be almost stationary, and the reason why it alters so little is that in the majority of men, whether they are savages or outwardly civilised beings, intellectual progress is so slow as to be hardly perceptible.—SIR JAMES G. FRAZER.

## THE CONVERSION OF NEWMAN

### III.

LEST there should be any doubt as to Newman's complete belief in the Church of Rome, and its absolute Infallibility, here are his own words from the "Apologia":—

"The Catholic Church . . . is . . . a supereminent prodigious power sent upon earth to encounter and master a giant evil. . . I profess my own absolute submission to its claim. I believe the whole revealed dogma as taught by the Apostles, as committed by the Apostles to the Church, and as declared by the Church to me. I receive it, as it is infallibly interpreted by the authority to whom it is thus committed, and (implicitly) as it shall be, in like manner, further interpreted by that authority till the end of time. I submit, moreover, to the universally received traditions of the Church . . . and I submit myself to those other decisions of the Holy See, theological or not. . ."

This seems to me clear enough—the great Dr. Newman went to the Roman Church and handed over his exceptional intellect—*theologically speaking*—to its keeping, and simply repeated parrot-like any of its dogmas without question or thought. That is what Rome did for him. Henceforth, he tells us, he had no difficulty in accepting any of its teachings as, for example, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. "I have no difficulty in receiving the doctrine," he says, "it so intimately harmonises with that circle of recognised dogmatic truths, into which it has recently been received." And just as he believed it, so he insists thousands also believe it without any difficulty.

Yet when he comes to the worship of the Virgin, though ostensibly he is with his Church without question, he is forced to put the brake on. He found, for instance, that a translation of the works of St. Alfonso (who specialised in "Mariolatry") which had been sent him, omitted any mention of Mary, and thus proved to him that not all Catholics shared the feelings of St. Alfonso. Newman writes:—

"Such devotional manifestations in honour of Our Lady had been my great *crux* as regards Catholicism; I say frankly I do not fully enter into them now; I trust I do not love her the less, because I cannot enter into them. They may be fully explained and defended; but sentiment and taste do not run with logic; they are suitable for Italy, but they are not suitable for England."

Mariolatry may be, possibly is, suitable for Italy, but for a true born Englishman, though in full submission to Rome, "no dogmatic symbol, no rite, no sacrament, no saint, not even the Blessed Virgin herself," must come between "the soul and its Creator." Perhaps the fact that the Blessed Virgin was of the female sex may have had something to do with Newman's preference for the male "Creator," face to face, without any intermediary.

But to understand Newman better we must go to some of his other works, and for this, "A Newman Synthesis" arranged by Erich Przywara, S. J. (Sheed and Ward), will give the reader ample scope for fathoming his mind. The book is packed with long extracts from over twenty of his books arranged under headings such as "Miracles," "God," "From Faith to Sight," "The Next World," and so on, and is directed to show how "Newman surveys the whole of the conflict and co-operation of nature and grace."

Here are a few examples:—

"Reason teaches you that there must be a God; else how was this all-wonderful universe made? It could not make itself; man could not make it, he is part of it; each man has a beginning, there must have been a first man, and who made him?"

"O my Lord God . . . I adore Thee, because Thou art so mysterious, so incomprehensible. Unless Thou wert incomprehensible, Thou wouldst not be God. For how can the Infinite be other than incomprehensible to me."

"As parts of a system, the Miracles recommend and attest each other, evidencing not only general wisdom, but a digested and extended plan. To my mind, certainly, it is incomparably more difficult to believe that the Divine Being should do one miracle and no more, than that he should do a thousand."

"Faith is, in its very nature, the acceptance of what our reason cannot reach, simply and absolutely upon testimony.

. . . Faith is the gift of God, and not a mere act of our own, which we are free to exert when we will. It is quite distinct from an exercise of reason, though it follows upon it. . . Be convinced in your reason that the Catholic Church is a teacher sent you from God, and it is enough."

"God the Incomprehensible, manifested in Christ, is everywhere on earth, and sees every crime committed whether under the sun or in the gloom of night; He is even the sustaining power of those who sin . . . nothing touches Him, though He touches all things."

"Christianity, then, is at once a philosophy, a political power, and a religious rite: as a religion it is Holy; as a philosophy it is Apostolic; as a political power it is imperial, that is, One and Catholic."

"I am in myself nothing but a sinner, a man of unclean lips and earthly heart. I am not worthy to enter into His presence. . . O my Lord and Saviour, in Thy arms I am safe; keep me and I have nothing to fear; give me up and I have nothing to hope for."

I have no space to quote a thousand things from this "Synthesis" of Newman—all beautifully written, as was everything he wrote, but all nothing but a compendium of misplaced energy. From the point of view of theology, I do not doubt that Newman can and does take rank with the supreme masters, but of what positive use is the kind of thing I have quoted above? So strongly was Newman imbued with the idea that his own soul had to be "saved" that he seems—to me at least—to forget almost everything else in the world. "The simple question is," he says despairingly in the "Apologia," "Can I (it is personal, not whether another, but can I) be saved in the English Church? Am I in safety were I to die to-night? Is it a mortal sin in me not joining another communion?" That passage surely gives the key to Newman's whole life. And when he came to his great decision we can understand his grovelling at the feet of Father Dominic.

It is the fashion to claim that in his controversy with Kingsley, Newman scored the victory in overwhelming measure. That may be, but where stand the two men these days? Kingsley fought the terrible industrial conditions of his day with all his power, and surely in his "Alton Locke" alone, he did more to expose the horrors of sweated labour than did Newman in all his long life? In "Westward Ho," he has given us a thrilling tale of adventure which has delighted young and old for 90 years, and will be read when most of Newman's tortured theology will be long discarded. And in the "Water Babies," Kingsley has given us a classic for children almost equal to the immortal "Alice." Both men wrote poetry, but my own preference is for Kingsley's. I prefer "The Sands of Dee" to "Lead Kindly Light." Kingsley's thought was for suffering humanity in this world, and he did what he could do to better man's condition here and now. Of course he was a Christian and believed in "our Lord"—like Dickens. But when it came to helping his fellow men Kingsley, like Dickens, would point to God in the sky, and then utterly ignoring him write passionately in true secularistic style—that only by his own efforts in this world can man achieve his salvation.

For Newman nothing mattered but making peace with God, at first through the Anglican Church, rightly interpreted, and then through the Roman Church, which did the correct interpreting itself. All his logical mind and great learning were devoted to this end, and the fate of his fellow beings in this world mattered to him little in comparison with that, in the awful next world, when Man met his Creator.

As he himself insists:—

"The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse."

As I read through the "Newman Synthesis" extracts from his works specially selected to show the greatness of his thought and mind, I could only feel how much of his frightened theology was as dead as mutton. In a world recovering from two terrible wars it is as out of place as the theology of Amen-Ra or Set. Except as a name and the writer of "Apologia Pro Vita Sua," and some poetry, Newman is dead.

H. CUTNER.

## THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

The sun may set and moon arise  
O'er hamlet, hill and drowsy dell;  
But he is wise who yet may tell  
Where lies the Poet's Paradise.

I took me to the meadow sweet,  
On new-mown scented hay to rest—  
But fleas and flies and ev'ry pest  
My blood would drink and body eat.

I sought the stillness of the Downs  
With mind attuned to Nature close—  
But merry-makers greedy, gross  
Made it a playground fit for clowns.

Beneath that heavy-leaved tree  
Where lovers sighed and poets read—  
Vile snoring bodies sprawled and spread  
While screaming children deafened me.

I walked the winding river's bank  
But saw no sails or swift canoes—  
Just mud and slime and sludgy ooze  
And God Almighty how it stank!

The shelving seashore tempted me—  
But where I once found virgin strand  
Fat females frolic'd on the sand  
Or bulged like bladders in the sea.

Nor in the green lanes put your trust  
Unless you seek an early death—  
And care not if your dying breath  
Be choked by petrol fumes and dust.

Is there no path where Man may roam  
In solitude and safe retreat?  
I've searched in vain and own defeat—  
In future I will stay at home!

W. H. WOOD.

## ACID DROPS

It is reported—we know not whether it be true or false—that two Jesuit priests tried to persuade General MacArthur to kill the myth of the Emperor of Japan's divinity. If that is done, it will leave the King of England the only monarch who can claim to be an incarnate God. Of course, we are not counting the remaining very primitive peoples who also claim to be incarnated by the tribal deity. Some of our readers may remember that we dealt fully with this view of the Coronation Service at Westminster. The matter is important enough to warrant a repetition of the subject. The King of England is King in virtue of birth. That is the secular side. The religious service at Westminster is a distinct thing, and is pure undiluted magic. Of course, most anthropologists are well aware of the real character of the Coronation Service, but it would not be polite to mention it to the people.

Of course, all this concerning the origin of kingship is quite well known to our leading anthropologists, but it is not polite to plainly let the cat out of the bag and apply their researches of primitive life to the life of to-day. Even so great a man as Sir James Frazer, except for brief statements here and there, follows the plan of keeping quiet where established religion is likely to be shaken too brutally. He confessed that in the preface to the second edition of his great work:—

"At present we are only dragging the guns into position; they hardly have begun to speak."

But it is the speaking of the guns—that is, the application of the existing knowledge concerning the nature of religious beliefs—that lifts the work of a man such as Sir James Frazer out of the fairy storybook. It is solid truth that the essential services which appear at the churches around us are nothing more than glorified repetitions of the mumbo-jumboism of primitive mankind. There is plenty of knowledge in the world. What we sadly need is moral and intellectual courage.

At a conference of "laymen" the Headmaster of Rugby advised parsons to get out of the pulpit and concentrate on winning outsiders instead of talking so much to a half-converted congregation. A bishop who was present retorted that there were too few parsons to carry out that work. The situation was quite amusing. The people are, according to the Headmaster, only half converted. But if the "big bugs" of the Church spend their time with outsiders they will lose the people who attend church. If they stick to the insiders there will be few outsiders to fill up the gaps in Church service. It seems to be a game of "heads we lose, tails we fail to win." The real truth is that the Churches are playing a losing game. Organised religion to-day is a gigantic swindle, and when swindlers are found out they face nothing but decline and disaster.

In a leading article, the "Church Times" claims that the Christian Church of to-day has "inherited the torch of freedom and faith from foregoing generations." We think there is some mistake in the wording. "Inherited" should read "captured," and "the torch of freedom" should read "control of freedom." That leaves it open to inquire just what the Church did do to prevent freedom developing? We remember that the "Church Times" was bitterly disappointed when the House of Lords judges decided no longer to treat Freethought propaganda as a criminal act. Nor do we find any objection from the "Church Times" to the policy of the B.B.C. which permits Christian advocates to preach outworn religious ideas and declines to admit anything to be said by way of correction. The "Church Times'" social history obviously needs brightening up a bit.

From a Cape Town paper (the "South African") we gather that God's worshippers are not pleased in the way God is treating their prayers. First they had a long spell of dry weather; so they prayed lustily to God and said they needed water. The petition went up to heaven and the rain came down; but it stopped not, and now the farmers are seeing their crops destroyed. The paper says the people are looking very gloomy. It serves them right. It was an insult to pray to God. They were really attempting to teach God how to manage the weather. They might just as well have offered to instruct Churchill how to run the Empire. Big men and big gods are apt to get rilged when they are told how to do their work.

We do not agree with Roman Catholic dignitaries as a rule, but we agree fully with what is said by one of them, and which spreads over the front page of the "Catholic Herald." The information given is that "Religion is caught, not taught," and with that we fully agree. Taught implies a process of learning, and the lesson may lead to a frame of mind that either rejects or accepts. But when one is caught it may mean something that is adopted without reflection. The process is best illustrated by a disease which one may catch but never wishes to have. We offer our thanks to Mgr. Williams for having so clearly put the truth before his people. Religion is something that catches one. It is caught as one catches a disease.

The mind of Mgr. Williams appears to run loose so far as letting the cat out of the bag is concerned. It will be remembered that when the Act of 1944 came before the House of Commons the Roman Catholic Members—under orders, we suspect—complained that the Government was treating Catholics very badly where monetary grants were concerned. The Members fought for more. Now one of their leaders—or masters—tells them that they have been treated very generously, and is only anxious to impress upon teachers that religion cannot be taught—it is caught. We have been driving that home for many, many years; but we never really expected that Roman Catholic leaders would agree with us.

We have a certain kind of respect for a good, strong, ingenious liar. But they must be one of the two, and the best must be without a flaw. So we cannot award a full medal for the R.C. Archbishop Godfrey. He has discovered that "Materialism and Secularist education have led the world to a state of destruction and confusion." Now, that is a very, very clumsy kind of lying, and Roman Catholic leaders above all others ought to do better. For no other institution ruled the world to such an extent and for so long a period as the Roman Catholic gang. For centuries it did fairly well as it pleased. Then for other centuries it shared the world with other Churches. Even now Christians are the largest group in Europe. And now a Catholic Archbishop informs us that it is Materialists and Secularists that brought the world to the point of ruin. Really, if the Archbishop cannot do better than he has done he ought to be turned out of the Church. We have no respect for a liar who lies so clumsily.

The Vicar of St. Bartholomew's, St. Pancras, has found a reason why people do not go to church. It is "because they are afraid." That leaves us very puzzled. If they are afraid to enter a Christian Church they must believe that they have God watching them, and one day they will catch it hot and strong. And good Christians they believe that they cannot escape God; they must also believe that they will get it hot and strong when God gets hold of them. And as they know when they look at the record they will find that some very shady characters have deceived that God will forgive. Really, we think Mr. Gordon Dickens has made a false calculation: a church should be the place that blackguards visit regularly. Indeed, a very large number of them do.

It is noticeable—but not at all astonishing to those who try honestly to connect Christian miracles with culture—to observe that the Christian deity and the Christian saints and priests produce miracles in exact relation to the general ignorance of the people. From the early centuries onward miracles were plentiful—until the revival of learning. Then miracles ceased to happen among the better educated classes, but there were plenty among the more ignorant or self-interested sections of society to keep the foolish legends in being. Now we have warnings from the Catholic Church to its followers and friends that greater care must be exercised by Catholic doctors and priests in admitting signs and wonders such as growing new legs or kidneys. Our world is a curious world. Let a man be caught selling coloured water as a certain cure, for cash, and he runs the risks of imprisonment. Do the same kind of thing in the name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost and he may take a front rank in social circles.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. MULLANY.—Much obliged for cuttings. We are much indebted to our readers who keep us informed of local happenings.

J. M. HASLANE.—Playing into the hands of the Churches by certain classes of newspapers is very obvious. One way to move the editors and proprietors of newspapers would be to take the care to remind them that there are other people than Christians in the world. Whether the letters are printed or not they will have some influence in the right direction.

E. TRASK.—Thanks for selections.

H. WINDLOW.—Too lengthy in these days of paper shortage. We do not see that an Atheist can commit a crime against God if he believes that gods are illusions. To do so is like punching a man who is not there to be punched. No court in England would send a man to prison for that offence.

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: Birmingham Branch N.S.S., 10s.; Manchester Branch N.S.S., 10s. 6d.

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.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

## SUGAR PLUMS

The British Section of the World Union of Freethinkers will hold a conference at Conway Hall from Tuesday, April 30 to Sunday, May 5 next, on "Humanism: A Sufficient Guide to Living," with the support of Dr. Geoffrey Bourne, Prof. J. B. S. Haldane, Sir Arthur Keith, Mr. Ernest Newman, Mr. Eden Phillpotts, Mr. H. G. Wells and other leading sympathisers. The programme will be ready shortly, and course tickets will be available. It is hoped that this taking up of the Bishops' challenge in "Towards the Conversion of Britain" will receive solid support and demonstrate the power of progressive thought. To avoid disappointment in hotel accommodation will all those wishing to reserve accommodation please forward their requirements without delay to Mr. H. J. Blackham, Room 43, Chandos House, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.

It is interesting to find Christian leaders protesting against being treated by the B.B.C. as Freethinkers who cannot be bought. The Dean of Canterbury is now finding fault that the B.B.C. has never permitted him to broadcast since he became an admirer of the good work done in Russia—without God. The Dean says he has been given freedom on the air in many countries, but not in England. We are not surprised. The policy of the B.B.C. is to prevent the truth about religion being known to the people. Many protests have been made and many people have declined invitations to join in the humbug. If we bear in mind that the aim of the B.B.C. is not to educate but to instruct, and that people submit to being raked in because of the advertising value of publicity given them, we shall understand the situation. From the point of view of freedom of thought the B.B.C. is a disgrace to the country.

The Bishop of Whitby says there is only one sin in the world—that is "the attempt to live independently from God." That is quite wrong. A much greater sin is trying to live with God. Half the troubles in the world have been caused by trying to

live with God. Living without God would not, of course, cure all our troubles or prevent new ones developing; but it certainly would enable us to look at our troubles with more courage and with less prejudice.

We are pleased to hear that Mr. J. T. Brighton had a very successful meeting at Belfast and a return visit is asked for. To-day, Mr. F. Ash will lecture in the Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North, Belfast, at 7-30 p.m., on "What's Wrong With Marriage?" The local branch appears to be getting well on its feet and under good management should provide an attractive centre of intellectual discussion.

An inquiring Christian sends us a few inquiries which reflect more on his Christianity than it attacks our position. He says that Atheism results in a sense of the futility of action; it finds no purpose in the universe; and he winds up by asking, if there is no rational purpose in the universe, and no sense or meaning in our lives, why should our irrational doctrine be thrust on people? Now, in its way all this is excellent, and we must congratulate the writer for having packed so much confusion in so small a space. But here goes: We have no sense of futility of effort because effort is not always futile. If the object of the writer is to persuade, then his effort may succeed. More, it is plain that we can and do achieve ends good or bad. And if we aim at goodness, then it does not matter a brass button whether or not our existence ends with the grave. We give a hungry man a meal because he needs feeding, not because he will live for ever. As to whether our doctrine is uninspiring or irrational, we do not find it either one or the other. And on that we must have the last word. We would also add that it touches the high-water mark of stupidity to argue that life here cannot be of any value if there is not another life somewhere else.

It seems there is some trouble in Church circles. A Canon Fergusson has taken to using a loudspeaker to broadcast his hymns. A number of workmen who have to rise early complain that the broadcasting prevents them getting a proper amount of sleep. But the Canon declines to stop and insists on being objectionable to decently minded people. Legal steps were taken and the men who wished to sleep are getting what they need. But the Canon threatens to take the matter to a higher Court. If he does, he will lose. Legally, the Canon is a "nuisance." We know many other parsons who are nuisances, but they do not come under any Act. On the other hand, we have heard of people who went to church in order to get a quiet sleep; also that children were sent to Sunday school that the parents might get an afternoon's sleep. Between sleep and religion there seems to be some sort of a connection.

When we read the praise given to Christianity—by professional Christians—we are reminded of a story told of Ford and the Ford cars. Ford took a friend with him to appreciate a new car. The car ran well for about twenty miles, then stopped suddenly. Ford jumped down and investigated. Then he shouted, "The fools have sent the car out without putting in the engine. The car has run twenty miles on its reputation." Christianity has for generations been running on its reputation; but its reputation has been created by interested parties. Christianity was praised generation after generation, and—an important consideration—the reputation for good was created by men who permitted no derogatory opinion. Brutality, intolerance, the persuasive quality of the torture chamber and the stake all combined to paint Christianity as it was desired. It is now facing an independent judgment, and the "best of all religions" comes out poorly from the trial.

"This is what the Church of Rome has ever done. It has traded upon the higher instincts of humanity, its faith and love, its passionate remorse, its self-abnegation and yearning after the unseen. . . . It has raised a power which has, whether foreseen by its authors or not, played the part of human tyranny, greed, and cruelty. To support this system it has habitually set itself to suppress knowledge and freedom of thought, before thought had taught itself to grapple with religious subjects, because it foresaw that this would follow. It has, therefore, for the sake of preserving intact its dogmas, risked the growth and welfare of humanity, and has in the eyes of all except those who value this dogma above all other things, constituted itself the enemy of the human race."—From "John Inglesant."

## GEORGE ELIOT AND THE EVANGELISTS

GEORGE ELIOT, the pen name of Mary Ann Evans, is more widely known as a novelist. But this accomplished writer was poet and essayist also, indeed the extent of her versatility was such that the realms of philosophy were entered and enriched by her many wise utterances.

It was apparent that a new star had appeared in the literary firmament when her "Scenes of Clerical Life" were published, although she had already attracted much attention by her scholarly translations of Strauss' "Life of Jesus" and a work by Feuerbach. Later her "Adam Bede," "The Mill on the Floss," "Silas Marner," etc., established her reputation as a novelist and placed her in the front rank among the great novelists of the nineteenth century.

The essays she contributed to the "Westminster Review" are among the most brilliant examples of periodical literature and are not so widely known. The essays were written before she embarked on her career as a novelist, and show her already as a penetrating observer of human nature. To Freethinkers, perhaps, her two most interesting essays are "Evangelical Teaching" and "Worldliness and other Worldliness," the latter title being adapted from a phrase by Coleridge. At the period of writing, and when she was about 35 years of age, she had recoiled from the pressure of a narrow dogmatism—having been a rigid Calvinist—and was hitting back at it with great vigour. Mathilde Blind, biographer and a champion of woman's rights, maintained that she equals Heine in the trenchant irony and forthright expression which is manifested in these attacks. George Eliot had suffered persecution and had met with considerable antagonism by embracing "a crude state of Free-thinking" as she termed it afterwards. The backsliding of so exemplary a member of the Faith, was an occasion for much talk in clerical and evangelical circles because, as a former Evangelist she had "flung her whole soul into a passionate acceptance of the teaching of Christianity and had carried her zeal to the state of asceticism." At one time an estrangement from her father was likely, but she was persuaded by friends to conform to his wishes as far as outward observances were concerned, and so a breach was averted.

The following scathing passage is from "Worldliness and other Worldliness": "For certain other elements of virtue, which are of more obvious importance to untheological minds—a delicate sense of our neighbour's rights, an active participation in the joys and sorrows of our fellowmen, a magnanimous acceptance of privation or suffering for ourselves when it is the condition of good to others, in a word, the extension and intensification of our sympathetic nature, we think it of some importance to contend, that they have no more direct relation to the belief in a future state than the interchange of gases in the lungs has to the plurality of worlds. Nay, to us it is conceivable that to some minds the deep pathos lying in the thought of human mortality—that we are here for a little while and then vanish away, that this earthly life is all that is given to our loved ones, and to our many suffering fellowmen, lies nearer the fountains of moral emotion than the conception of extended existence. To us it is a matter of unmixed rejoicing that this latter necessity of healthful life is independent of theological ink, and that its evolution is ensured in the interaction of human souls as certainly as the evolution of science or of art, with which, indeed, it is but a twin ray, melting into them with indefinable limits." Power of thought, economy of words and elegant phraseology combine in making an effective and pungent statement. The evangelical preacher is dealt with in the following trenchant and caustic passage: "Given a man with a moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in

which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? Where is that Goshen of intellectual mediocrity in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egoism as God-given piety? Let such a man become an evangelical preacher; he will then find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with the prestige of erudition, a middling morale with a high reputation for sanctity. Let him be unflinching in insisting on the eternity of punishment, but diffident of curtailing substantial comforts of time; ardent and imaginative on the pre-millennial advent of Christ, but cold and cautious towards every other infringement of the status quo. Let him set up as an interpreter of prophecy, rival "Moore's Almanack" in the prediction of political events, and let him be less definite in showing what sin is than in showing who is the Man of Sin. . . . In this way he will draw men to him by the strong cords of their passions, made reason-proof by being baptised with the name of piety."

Others felt the lash of George Eliot's strictures besides the Evangelists. She was particularly severe on Edward Young author of "Night Thoughts." It was this poet who wrote:—

"By night an Atheist half believes in God," Night 5, line 177.

Young's contempt for this world, of all of us, and his exaltation of the "next world" provoked George Eliot into writing one of her wittiest and most sarcastic reviews. Her analysis of this work is one of the best of its kind but space does not permit of further quotations.

In conclusion it is interesting to note that among the distinguished visitors to be seen more or less frequently at her receptions were Herbert Spencer, Professor T. H. Huxley, Frederick Harrison, F. Myers, W. K. Clifford, Moncure Conway, the poets Browning and Tennyson, and the painters Burne Jones and Millais. In a letter to the Press Herbert Spencer said: "George Eliot . . . was distinguished by that breadth of culture and universality of power which have since made her known to all the world." A glowing and eloquent tribute to a great woman by a great man!

S. GORDON HOGG.

## BOOKS WORTH WHILE

"The Harbour Called Mulberry" by Cecil McGivern, published by Pendulum Publications, 10, Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, London, W.C.; price 2s.

THIS is a small book of some 44 pages, crammed with interest. It is the story of the harbour that sailed to France on June 6, 1944, and is produced with the co-operation of the Admiralty, the War Office, the Ministry of Supply and the Ministry of Labour. The script is taken from the B.B.C. radio broadcast.

The book is well produced and lavishly illustrated with photographs. Mulberry was probably one of the most outstanding features of the many wonderful undertakings of the Great War. It was a triumph of British engineering, workmanship and design. It made possible what was considered to be impossible.

This book is worth keeping so that in years to come we can show it to people who have perhaps forgotten what it all meant—a proof that, in daring and conception and mechanical skill, the people of Britain can still show an example to the whole world. Mulberry was essentially a combined operation. There was no one in particular, such as de Lesseps of Suez Canal fame, who stood out above the rest. The whole effort was co-operative; it was all team work in which every man played his part.

This book is exceptionally good value for 2s.

"Inside Latin America" by John Gunther, published in 1940 by Hamish Hamilton, London; 388 pages.

It is more than likely that this book is now out of print, but it is still to be found in any good library.

John Gunther, who will be remembered as the author of "Inside Europe" and "Inside Asia" has produced here a book which is equally outstanding and that is indeed high praise.

"Inside Latin America" deals intimately with the politics and people of the twenty republics which comprise Central and South America. Even the ordinary well-read man is very vague about these countries. For example, how many of us are aware that Mexico is as large as Italy, Germany, France, England, Belgium and Holland put together, or that 90 per cent. of its people are Indians and half castes?

Right through the history of these countries one sees the poisonous effect of Christianity. It was two years after Cortez conquered Mexico that the Roman Catholic Church graciously admitted that Indians had souls. For hundreds of years the Latin countries were held in the grip (and many of them still are) of a deadly soul-crushing superstition.

Side by side with the appalling poverty of most of the population was to be found the wealth and landed possessions of the Church. The deliberate attempt of the Vatican to embroil the U.S.A. in a war with Mexico—nominally over the Oil Wells—was defeated by President Woodrow Wilson. The real reason of the Vatican's indignation was that the Mexican Government had dis-established the Church, confiscated their vast holdings, and made education compulsory. Even to-day 60 per cent. of the Mexican people are illiterate, but this is a much better record than the Church can claim. After 300 years of absolute power, the Church's record was over 90 per cent.

It may also surprise many readers to learn that many of these Latin Republics contain from 60 to 90 per cent. of Indian population. Here, in Britain, we are fighting for better social conditions but the fight, generally, in Latin America is against crass religious superstitions, appalling social conditions and illiteracy.

Here, as in every other country, the Church has solidly allied with reaction, and it can be said with truth that religion has been the greatest curse.

Those people who tell us with smug self-complacency that Freethinkers, in attacking religion, are whipping a dead horse, ought to read this book. If their minds are not choked with supernatural nonsense they will see what religion has done in blocking progress and causing untold misery and wretchedness.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

**A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT**, by Chapman Cohen. An outline of the philosophy of Freethinking. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.

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

**SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS**, by G. W. Foots. Price, cloth 3s., postage 3d.

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

**THE MORAL LANDSLIDE.** An Inquiry into the Behaviour of Modern Youth. By F. J. Corina. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

**ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING**, by Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d. The four volumes, 10s. post free.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### GOD AND THE CINEMA INDUSTRY.

SIR—According to the headlines across the front of a local cinema, the Almighty has been incorporated in both the aviation and cinema industries, as is shown by the following:—

#### "GOD IS MY CO-PILOT"

#### "ROARING TO GLORY WITH THE FLYING TIGERS"

Whilst I have a fairly good knowledge of religion in various countries, and with the different sects in the States, this reads to a British mind like blatant blasphemy.

I have not been to see the film, so that I cannot say what examination God went through before he took the pilot's seat, but as a specialist on thunder and lightning, and the weather generally, his experience should be extremely useful.

The title does not say whether he sub-divided himself into a succession of Trinities in order to accompany each pilot, but it is obvious that this is implied. It is, of course, a pity that God did not apprentice himself to this dangerous occupation until it became tolerably safe, as his knowledge of angels should have made it possible for aviators to bale out without using the cumbersome parachute.

His Son is, of course, world-renowned as the person who ascended into heaven, and considering the extent to which that place has receded since the development of astronomy, stratosphere pilots will be calling on the Almighty to take the co-pilot's chair in the new machines mankind is inventing.

It is possible that the next move will be to incorporate the aviator in their song books, always bearing in mind not the efficiency of man's creation in the airplane, but the part they consider God plays in its successful flight. Exactly what happened to God the co-pilot when the machines were blown to pieces in the air, or their occupants were drowned in the sea, is left to the imagination. "Eternal Father strong to save" has been chanted from a million churches, but the Plimsoll line saved more lives than all the prayers and hymns. The same is true of aviation: that it is the intelligence of man that has made them possible, and if they have been misused we must blame only man's inhumanity.

This latest importation is an insult to our intelligence, but it shows that the religious element in the U.S.A. has moved a step higher and is prepared to associate their God chiefly with war, but apparently with all the services.—Yours, etc.,

T. D. SMITH.

## 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., Dr. J. C. FLUGEL, D.Sc.: "Morals in Moderation." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., OLAF STAPLEDON, M.A., Ph.D.: "Is Humanism Enough?"

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., Mr. F. ASH: "What's Wrong With Marriage?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Brains Trust": Bring your questions.

Bristol Branch N.S.S. (Crown & Dove Hotel, Bridewell Street, Bristol).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m., Mr. G. THOMPSON: A lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Professor LAVREN: "Russia and the Post-War."

## CHASING PARADOXES

THE subject of paradoxes, is one of peculiarly and fascinating interest, and as life is full of such things affecting us in various and sundry ways, it may not be out of place to say a few words to explain their nature, texture, and meaning which will thus enable us to identify their truthful significance in theological and secular circles.

When I look back far enough I recall that Edgar Allen Poe was the first to point out to me their existence, as he provides a most appropriate and telling example, which forms the very core and plot of that delightful yarn enacted on French soil, "The Purloined Letter." Another author of popular fame—that tainted popist G. K. Chesterton, made his whole outlook a series of paradoxes, many of which he exploited in his writings, and diverse examples are to be discovered in his published collections of short stories, "Tales of the Flying Inn" and also in those quaint and nonsensical yarns featuring "Father Brown" and "Flambeau"—that brace of "comic opera sleuths."

From time to time I keep shooting at my friends in an effort to get them to define a paradox, and I fear some of 'em regard me as crazy because I am prone to flog the subject, which usually bores them to distraction. They usually flounder, then grope and stumble, and finally sheer clean away from this topic which holds not the slightest interest for them. One or two of the intellectuals have given me quite apt and coherent ideas, without revealing any show of interest, however.

The realm of Nature is herself a marvellous illustrator of paradoxes. Just consider a cuckoo's egg slyly laid amongst those belonging to a thrush's nest, then take the chameleon, who, at the first hint of peril changes its colour to render it invisible to its enemies. The Arctic Hare likewise changes its coat to match its winter background. The timid Salmon trout also adapts its costume to coincide with the pebbly and gravelled bed of the limpid stream. Another classic example which Nature so often springs upon us is that of the mirage with its "optical illusion" of palm trees and an oasis in the wilds of the African desert.

My new English "Dic." defines a Paradox (Gr. Para.—against; doxa=opinion) as being . . . an assertion seemingly absurd, but really correct . . . or something quite at variance with normal ideas of what is probable or possible. Fowler, in his "Modern English Usage" avoids any mention of the topic, but my copy of "The A B C of English Usage" aptly states that . . . the figure has been described as "a truth doing a somersault"; but I prefer to define it as "The truth turned inside out" or "The truth, mentally invisible," or "The truth . . . cunningly camouflaged"!

After studying Nature's copious examples, much useful study can be performed in the religious field, which provides endless examples of mirages, illusions and delusions very artfully concealed and camouflaged, designed to cajole and bamboozle the devout believer into accepting Bible teachings without giving away "trade secrets"—that, being one reason why the art of camouflage is not included in our State school curriculum; for fear that our precocious youth might get a chance to do some profitable exploring. What a pity!

If you delve closely into your "Grammar of Freethought" you will be rewarded with gems of paradox of which, however, I need only quote the following:—

"In the name of God, vices have been declared virtues, and virtues branded as vices. To fight for reform is to rebel against the existing order . . . the healthful struggle of the new against the old, and of the living present against dead past. The rebel is thus a public danger and a benefactor."

G. K. Chesterton provides the following: "God paints in many colours but he never paints so gorgeously, I had almost said so gaudily, as when he paints in white."

Logan P. Smith said: "She herself who goes against the fashion is herself its slave."

Maurice Colbourne: "People go to Church every morning at six, the only visible result being a bad temper in the evening; others will stamp themselves Christian if they push harlots from the musical hall into the streets—others again become clergymen and presume. The priesthood having ousted Christ . . . neither obeyed nor even heard the call of Christ, when war broke out."

Norman Angell: "A Gilbertian situation—a paradox which perplexes people is that of a person being a Lord and a Church minister in one. The two personal or aspects refuse combination. Is it solely for the welfare of the State that peers spiritual should represent religion in the legislature?"

Finally, I mention the fact that although we are all living in a world of unparalleled abundance, nearly everything we so badly need to eke out our comfort and enjoyment of life is carefully and rigidly controlled and kept in short supply, plentiful commodities being either dumped or burnt rather than be permitted to interfere with the ceiling prices rampant in the markets. All of you recall the news of queues in Sheffield unable to obtain fish supplies—while at the same time, tons of good fish were being cast back into the sea up at Aberdeen!

Don't overlook Shakespeare and Robert Burns for sources of paradoxes, if you feel that way. Which ever way you seek you will not have far to go to reap reward, and thus obtain amusement and divertisement.

Good hunting you paradox chasers!

ED. H. SIMPSON.

## TO A GREAT SOLDIER

PATTON is dead, and America has lost a general who will go down in history as one of the greatest soldiers of all time. He was great because he was admired by his superiors and trusted by his subordinates.

What matter if a certain section of the Press have made him a myth? What matter if he did adopt a "go-slow" policy in Bavaria? What matter if he did slap a "shell-shocked" G.I. in the face in Sicily? His soldiers made no nasty comments, and could there be better qualified judges of his conduct than the men who followed him from Casablanca to the Ardennes?

Recently I heard a gentleman comparing him to Montgomery, and he made it come out in Montgomery's favour. I would not compare these two men, but my conclusions will be very different.

Montgomery directed operations from a safe place miles behind the lines, Patton directed operations from the top of a tank at the head of his men; Montgomery believed (or said he did) in the aid of the Almighty God of Battles, Patton believed in the strength and the skill of his men. A man who rode into Germany on the top of a tank at the head of his Forces while the battle was in progress is a far, far better man than one who rode into Tripoli in a staff car in the rear of a pipe-band long after the last shot had been fired.

Patton's greatest attribute was that he believed in men and that he behaved like a man. His men loved him for that. Montgomery did not believe in men, and behaved more like a Puritan preacher who has squashed a fly than like a man. It is no secret that his men all hated him for that.

Patton's men judged him by the man in him, and the conclusion is that he was first a soldier and second a general. Montgomery's men tried to do the same thing, and they concluded that he was first a parson and second a general.

For Monty a fitting epitaph would be: "He tried to live like a saint." Of Patton only one thing can be said: "He lived and died a man."

FRANCIS I. GOULD.