

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor : CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

More About Sunday Cinemas

GENERALLY speaking the "Church Times" has never been fantastically opposed to Sunday entertainments. It does not encourage or oppose them with the ferocity of some other sects. After all, the number of people who attend theatres are comparatively small, and in any case they affect only a small number of the population. But the question of Sunday cinema entertainment is another matter. The numbers are larger and it clashes directly with the religious training of children. The training of children to attend Sunday school is vital to the welfare of the Churches. All religious leaders are agreed that to-day, more than ever, it is essential to capture the child if they are to exercise religious control over adults. And the religious outlook was never so black as it is to-day.

But it happens that the Leeds Labour Party has publicly declared its intention to support the opening of cinemas on Sunday, and it may be noted that in many cases that means special entertainments for children. Against this the "Church Times" protests politely, but protests. Of course it does not plainly say that the objection is purely religious; it prefers to play the family welfare move, thus: "Sunday amusements ought not to be so devised as to prevent Christian workers from doing their duty to worship God." But how can the opening of cinemas on Sunday prevent anyone going to Church? No one can compel citizens to go to the "pictures." On the contrary, people are compelled to pay for their seats. On the other hand, the Church is quite free and a bribe is offered—to be paid in the next world—to all, who will attend. The Leeds Labour Party offers no bribe to lure people to the cinema, and no one is prevented from going to Church if so inclined. We feel quite certain that the Leeds Labour Party have no design on the Churches. They have not suggested that men and women, with their children, shall be compelled to go to the "movies." Everyone who prefers Church may go there, and if God is really against Sunday shows he should make his wish clear to all. But the days when the Churches could insist on people going to Church are past, and there is no likelihood of that power being regained. Meanwhile we may remember that it was a cobbler who declared there was nothing like leather. The demand for a rational Day of Rest comes direct from the people who are most interested in lifting the level of the "common" people higher than it is to-day. The picture of people being dragged from Church to Cinema will not do.

We know nothing of the personnel of the Leeds Labour Party, but we really cannot picture them as planning to break down family life and to prevent the union of the family on the Day of Rest. Bless our editor; it is in the name that the family can really meet—not in the Church

It is sending the children off to Sunday school that prevents the communion of parents and children. It is a trip to the "pictures" that will bring them together. It really looks as though it is the fanatical sermonisers who disrupt the comradeship of parents and children. Really we cannot compliment either the wisdom or the wit of the writer who is responsible for the paragraphs we have been criticising.

It must be noted that this anxiety to educate children by the methods now adopted is quite new. For many generations the general pressure of the social environment did all that was necessary. But for many years new factors have been at work. First, there was the rise of Non-conformity which led to at least two groups of Christians each striving to prevent their children being "contaminated" by other Christian groups. Then came the development of social life which fixed more attention upon real education and bothered less over forms of religion.

The "common" people began to move. The Church had no anxiety to see that people were educated, only to see they were under the control of the Churches.

Quite definitely the Established Church managed to keep the educational level for the people lower than it was in most continental cities. Gradually the feeling developed that as the social and scientific developments broadened and deepened, the Churches—both Established and "Free"—began to realise that it was a matter of capturing children before they reached a certain age or they would be lost for ever. The clergy are doing to-day exactly what they have always done, with the difference that Established and Nonconformists realise that unless children are caught when young the chance of them becoming supporters of any of the Churches is very slim indeed. The real teacher of children should be a well developed and educated social environment.

Religion and Life

It may be quite by accident that the leading article of the same issue of the "Church Times" curiously fits in with what we have been saying. The article commences in the orthodox style by reminding us that Jesus said that the fields about him and his followers were ripe for harvest. But having started on that hopeful note it has nothing to offer but continuous dolefulness. In the 1914-18 war there was a very hard struggle to get capital from an alleged growth of religious fervour. Of course the rush of converts never appeared and gradually that slogan was dropped. Now we have had another war and we are faced with two countries—Russia and China—with population totalling six or seven hundred million, which to a considerable extent set religion on one side and officially are without any. Up to date the latest war has brought nothing to help religion and its advocates have to face a very dark

future. But still in the usual way of fooling the people we are told "there are favourable features in the present situation." This hopeful statement is immediately followed with the plain statement that "the war has not been accompanied by any religious revival," yet there has been a sudden awakening among many to "aesthetic and artistic values." In the name of all that is sensible what connection is there between "aesthetic and artistic values" and the Christian religion? Again, "housewives may line up outside the shops . . . but young people queue for much longer for ballet, drama, and music, and are well content to come back with nothing but the memory of an unearthly beauty." Please note the slipping in of the phrase "unearthly beauty"; quite harmless if used by honest men and women, but the suggestion here is that the search for music and art belongs to the religious side of life. It is quite possible that the "Church Times" uses the words carelessly, but it may be taken by the psychologist as one of the methods by which the Churches always worked their policy of deceit and misunderstanding.

From misunderstanding the "Church Times" moves almost mechanically to sheer empty bathos. It laments the "fewness of the labourers"—that is parsons and lay helpers—to keep the people from forsaking Christianity altogether. But if there were anything really vital in Christianity—after wiping off all that it receives and practises under pressure of secular social forces—the Christian religion should by now be firmly established beyond any hope of displacement. That clearly is not the case. And this for a final example:—

"Nor can it be said that a nation in which men and women have been willing to abandon material comfort and reward for the sake of some idea is one that should be expected to turn a deaf ear on the religious appeal."

We agree that it should not be expected if the Christian religion served any vital purpose in life. Those who have the capacity for studying the nature of social life will see that in spite of all "fall-backs" there is all over the world a greater building up of what one may call automatic recognitions of the value of secular achievements. The lessons that children and adults learn without other tuition save the pressure of social life, do grow in spite of all set-backs. But with religion not only must the Churches and religious advocates be on their guard constantly to see that religion is not set on one side, but they see the social hold on religion getting weaker and weaker.

It is just over two generations ago that one of the leading thinkers of his day and a leading man in the higher branches of law, Mr. Justice Stephen, said:—

"If human life is in the course of being fully described by science, I do not see what materials there are for any religion or, indeed, what would be the use of one and why it is wanted. . . We can get on very well without one, for though the view of life which science is opening to us gives us nothing to worship, it gives us an infinite number of things to enjoy. . . The world seems a very good world if it would only last. It is full of pleasant people and curious things, and I think most men find no great difficulty in turning their minds away from its transient character. Love, friendship, ambition, science, literature, art, politics,

and a thousand other matters will go equally well, so far as I can see, whether there is or is not a God or a future life."

That was written in the early "eighties" and time has only endorsed the opinion then expressed. We think that some words we wrote nearly fifty years ago will be a fitting close to the special pleading of the "Church Times" in 1946.

The notion that religion is man's deepest need is pure fallacy. God is not even man's most enduring need. It is rather that which comes to-day and has gone to-morrow. By a mere accident due to inevitable ignorance, gods have played a part in the human scene. They have here and there dominated life, but only for a time, for the whole process of civilisation is in part substituting human sense and energy to get rid of the gods. Mankind has not yet rid itself of the dead weight of gods, but it is on the march. And it is not the avowed Atheist only who dismisses the gods from his mind, but it is endorsed by the whole of modern science.

Man does not grow with God; on the contrary he grows with his rejection. Family life with all the strength and affections that grow with it is independent of the gods. Man to-day may be struggling to hold on to God, but sooner or later his struggle consists in cleansing his mind of superstitions. The lie of the priest that man is never happy until he discovers God, is given in the frantic moaning from our religious leaders that people are neglecting God. They are not neglecting God; they are discharging the idea. Millions of men and women, neither the least worthy nor the least intelligent, are finding to-day in social life and in the struggle to make that life better and stronger, all and more than they once thought they valued in the field of religion. They have passed through the religious phase of development. They have seen what Man was, they know what Man is, and that understanding holds out hope for the future.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

DAVID COPPERFIELD'S CREATOR

II.

DICKENS returned to England a very restless man. In the succeeding eleven months he composed no novels, but drifted from one subject to another. Private performances of plays engaged his outward activities but his thoughts seemed centred in Fleet Street where, with Jerrold and Wills, he was secretly preparing plans for the founding of the "Daily News" which paper he became the first editor.

It is intimated that: "The actual inception of the paper may be said to have lain in the conversation between Dickens, Paxton and Bradbury and Evans (and probably Forster in the spring of 1844)."

Joseph Paxton of Crystal Palace renown, was prepared to render financial aid, and his weighty influence with the railway was considered a great asset. Other capitalists were willing to co-operate, and everything seemed propitious. Bradbury and Evans granted £1,000 per annum to the editor, which he promptly doubled. Indeed, he seems to have lost all sense of proportion. He hectored his colleagues and engaged contributors regardless of cost. Thus, the publishers found their editor difficult to work with or restrain.

The new journal was priced 5d. against 7d. charged for the "Times" and most other dailies and gave every promise of success when, ironically enough, Dickens lost all interest in the new venture. Two days after Peel had announced his conversion to Cobden's Free Trade views, the editor's indifference to the welfare of his journal became evident to all. "A week later," his biographer observes, "he wrote to Forster, 'I have been revolving plans in my mind this morning for quitting the paper and going abroad again to write a new book in shilling numbers.'" Then, ten days later, he unceremoniously resigned his post. Curiously, it appears that he had regarded the "Daily News" as his own special creation, to be treated accordingly. The entire transaction is fantastic and reflects little lustre on Dickens. John Forster stepped into Boz's shoes and afterwards became his first and, in some respects, his best biographer.

When writing to Elizabeth Barrett, who was soon to become his wife, Robert Browning tells her that one of Dickens' numerous children is to be christened in Marylebone Church. "When you remember," observed the poet, "what the form of sponsorship is, to what it pledges you in the Church of England—and then remember that Mr. Dickens is an enlightened Unitarian—you will get a curious notion of the man, I fancy."

Dominated by the wandering spirit, Dickens decided to take a holiday abroad. From Ostend he proceeded with his large family to Germany where his writings had been extensively read in translation. "Oliver Twist" and "Nicholas Nickleby" had also been published in Italian, while some of his novels had been rendered into Russian and Dutch.

It is gratifying to note that: "Bernhard, Tauchnitz had commenced his famous series of English books in 1841 with 'Pelham' which was followed by 'Pickwick' the same year and by 'American Notes' the next. In 1843 this enlightened publisher visited authors in England and generously arranged to pay them a fee though no international copyright existed. . . In return Dickens offered to supply him with early corrected proofs of future works which would enable him to publish in Germany at the same time that the book came out in England."

Engels hailed Dickens as a spiritual brother and even the censorious Karl Marx conceded that he was a sound social reformer, even if the economist viewed him as vague and visionary in his solutions.

In Switzerland, Dickens resided in Lausanne and worked on "Dombey and Son." In Paris he visited Victor Hugo whose remarkable personality immensely impressed him. The domestic adjustments of Hugo he found very suggestive. "It interested Dickens very much to hear that Madame Hugo was loved by Sainte Beuve and Julie the actress by Victor Hugo, and that not one of their friends took these arrangements amiss."

"Dombey" and Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" appeared in parts simultaneously, but Thackeray's masterpiece sold 7,000 copies only, against his rival's sale of 25,000 copies. Thackeray's previous writings, however, had been issued under the pen name of M. A. Titmarsh. Thus, when he published in his real name, it was virtually unknown.

Dickens' greatest novel was still to come—his own favourite work "David Copperfield." Before he began to compose this wonderful book he visited East Anglia where many of its scenes were laid. He then proceeded with Forster to Bath where they dined with that fine humanist, W. S. Landor, on his birthday. Landor wrote thanking his friends for their visit as follows:

"On the night you left me I wrote the following:—

"Dying Speech of a Philosopher.

"I strove with none for none was worth my strife,

"Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;

"I warmed both hands before the fire of life;

"It sinks and I am ready to depart."

In addition to writing "David Copperfield," Dickens edited and contributed to "Household Words" which became a valuable

property. Partly autobiographical, "Copperfield" was moderately popular and its author's success in creating fictitious characters from living models induced him, according to his biographer, to introduce contemporary writers into his next novel, "Bleak House." This work contains a pitiless exposure of the old Chancery Court with its dilatory and costly proceedings and the lives it ruined or drove to suicide in sheer despair. Landor appears in its pages as Boythorn who is considerably treated, if his mannerisms are exaggerated. A more serious matter is Dickens' caricature of Leigh Hunt as Harold Skimpole. Not only is he referred to by Inspector Bucket as a queer bird, but his childlike and bland innocence; his innate artfulness; his parasitic propensities and his shameful vilification of his benefactor, John Jarndyce, expose him to the contempt of the reader. That Hunt was wounded is not surprising. It is true that he was ever impecunious and improvident, but that is no excuse for Dickens' mordant portrait.

In "Bleak House" we see Mrs. Jellaby devoting her days to the improvement of African blacks while her own family suffers from dirt and neglect and her worried husband is driven into insolvency. Dickens' satire not only embraces the "general cultivation of the coffee berry and the natives," but foreign missions of every description. The book was appreciated and its sales doubled those of "David Copperfield."

"Dombey" certainly contains much excellent material but, somehow, it seems to lack the finish of "Copperfield" and "Bleak House." Dombey himself is the personification of arrogant pride who finally bites the dust. Carker and Edith, Dombey's second wife, are studies in scoundrelism and caprice. Captain Cuttle is a great creation; the Major is a cynical worldling and little Paul, a pathetically precocious child. Still, Dame Hennessy's conclusion seems just when she writes: "'Dombey and Son' makes the impression of a leafless tree illuminated fitfully by the twinkling lights carried by the Toodles, Solomon Gill, Cuttle and Gay; flickering lights held by Mrs. Chick and Lucretia Tox; and lurid lights brandished by Mrs. Brown and Mrs. McStinger. It is the office of these taper-bearers to reveal to us the whole person and house of Dombey in all their aridity and arrogance."

"Hard Times" must be numbered among Dickens' minor writings. It is a slashing attack on the Manchester School of Economics, but is more a semi-Socialistic tract than a solid contribution to social science. Ruskin liked the work, but even he admitted that "its value was impaired by displaying Bounderby as a monster instead of a worldly employer and Stephen Blackpool as a saint instead of an honest employee."

"Little Dorrit" has many merits, but it scarcely ranks with Dickens' greatest novels. Much of it lacks vitality, although the mournful Marshalsea scenes are drawn from life. Arthur Clennam is the book's hero and he comes to London to meet his miserable mother on a dismal Sunday evening. So the novelist hurls a dart at the rigid Sabbatarians who make Sunday as sombre as possible. "In every thoroughfare, up almost every alley, and down almost every turning, some doleful bell was throbbing, jerking, tolling as if the Plague were in the city and the dead-carts were going round. Everything was bolted and barred that could possibly furnish relief to an overworked people. No pictures, no unfamiliar animals, no rare plants or flowers, no natural or artificial wonders of the ancient world—all taboo with that enlightened strictness that the ugly South Sea gods in the British Museum might have supposed themselves at home again."

A man of enormous energy, Dickens severely overtaxed his strength and his readings, continued as they were after the great physician Sir Henry Thompson, had forbidden them, hastened the end of a great career at the early age of 58.

T. F. PALMER.

ACID DROPS

A Mrs. Kathleen Oliver has great daring in advising the Vicar of Dartford to read the Bible. That is an advice that the Vicar gives to his parishioners, so he cannot object to counsel being given to him in return. The offence committed by the lady was she had given cigarettes to some German prisoners of war. She gives Jesus Christ as her guide by saying that when one cheek is smitten to turn the other; to which the Vicar retorts by denouncing "giggling girls and irresponsible women who have been petting and pampering German prisoners of war." But that is not argument; it is just abuse, and not very telling abuse either. For Jesus did tell his followers to use a punch in the face as prelude to more punches. Of course it is said that Jesus did not mean what he said, but surely the Vicar and his like are to be blamed for advising people to read the New Testament. Well, Mrs. Oliver did and the Vicar goes for her. That is not "cricket."

We agree with the lady that the Vicar should read the Bible, moreover we would advise him to *understand* it; if he did that he would find it a very interesting book. In it he would find the advice to get knowledge but above all to get understanding. Any fool can read a book but it does take a measure of intelligence to understand it. The Bible will give the intelligent reader an idea of religion in the raw, and the New Testament will furnish a picture of the attempt to re-establish decaying superstitions plastered over by a number of moral maxims. As life-long Atheists we advise people to read the Bible and the New Testament. So far we are with Mrs. Oliver, but we are afraid that her reading of the Bible is not much higher, scientifically, than that of Canon Mitchell.

Strangely enough the next paper we pick up also illustrates the little faith that parsons have in their own creed, and the reliance they put in money collections. The Rev. Mullins is, according to the "Blyth News," not very blithe over the cash that is coming in. He says that his parishioners give much more over the counter for tobacco than they do in support of the Church. The parallel is exact. The smoke that follows the visit to the tobacconist is seen and enjoyed; the smoke which is promised in the next world is neither enjoyed nor asked for. The Vicar says it is not right that Church collections should suffer because of bad weather, cooking dinners, having company, illness, or business, so he advises that each parishioner should pay so much per month whether he goes to Church or not. Now that strikes us as a very sensible plan. It saves bother on both sides. But we question whether there would not be a growing percentage of monthly debts? The Vicar is showing his hand too plainly.

Somewhere in the Bible there is a passage saying that "God moveth the hearts of men." Well, here is an excellent idea for God showing that he does something. Every believer in God should sit still every Saturday evening, say, over a final smoke, to see whether God moves him—or her—to go to Church the next day and "plank" down something for the parson. Recording angels would know how much money each person has, and they could "move" each to give according to his or her possessions. That would save a lot of time and trouble. Moreover it might give encouragement to all the Churches—and they really do need something to cheer up God's representatives.

Here is something that ought to help somebody. One representative of Mohammedanism in England is Mr. J. D. Shames. He gives us the information that Alman, a promised Messiah—there have been many of them—publishes the information that he has discovered the tomb of Jesus. We are not sure whether the tomb is in India or Jerusalem, but either place will do. But the mere discovery of the tomb is not enough. What we should like to hear is whether the body of Jesus was therein. At any rate, anyone who wishes for further information should write to Hazrat Amirumomineen Khalifatunmasih, 2, Qadian, Punjab, India. The address should make any corpse uneasy.

In Birmingham attempts are being made to prevent the appearance of the film "The Wicked Lady" on Sundays. We do not know whether the film is "spicy" or not, but if it is we

can count on good Sabbatarian Christians filling the theatre during the week even though they boycott it in play or not during the Sabbath. The certainty is that a great many people who never saw anything indecent in the picture will read plenty into it after a certain type of Christian gets going. In all these matters the "good" Christian contaminates the stage as he does so many other phases of life. There is more done by "good" Christians to encourage "suggestive" plays and books than by any other body of people.

Twenty thousand people cheered at the rededication of a statue of "Our Lady" in Munich by Cardinal Faulhaber. We are not surprised. Munich was the great stronghold of Nazism. They cheered Hitler and his bodyguard of filthy torturers with even greater enthusiasm than they treated the sacred statue. Indeed many of our readers will remember that from the earliest outbreaks of religion. Hitler always insisted that he was an agent of God, and the brutalities that followed his rule were a fair expression of the brutalities that accompanied the religious outbreaks of the early Middle Ages, allowing for mechanical and other developments. Indeed, visitors to Nuremberg may still see the most brutal of the many forms of torture of the Middle Ages, and on the outside of the instrument is the large sized picture of the "Virgin."

The Bishop of Southwell is very downhearted concerning the outlook for Christianity. We are not surprised. We also should feel uneasy in a like condition. But it does not seem to occur to the Bishop that God and the Churches have had things their own way for a long while, and the brewing of the evils we have all had to face is a consequence, partly at least, of the rule of religion. Even now the only advice that the Churches can offer us is to get back to God. That is like advising a sick man to take a dose of prussic acid to cure toothache.

Our spiritual guides must find some excuse for God sitting back during the war and doing nothing. The reason for this as given by Canon Richardson of Birmingham, is that unless the Churches can better creeds the outlook for them is black. But that is surely only another way of saying that the existing creeds—albeit framed under the help of God—are worn out. What he does not see, or will not see, is that while the words may have remained unchanged in the letter, commonsense and human decency have compelled new readings of "God's will." In other words, it is not gods who instruct people; it is people who instruct gods. There was no message from God that people should not be stoned to death, or the torturing of old women for witchcraft, or the hundred-and-one brutal and nonsensical religious rites. It was developing mankind that educated the gods, and now we are approaching the time when they will be discarded altogether.

But all this talk of Man falling short of God as a cause for our troubles is, when analysed, just nonsense. The good that is done in the world is not done by gods but by men. God did not make the world decently for Man, it was Man who did that job. God spreads water all over the landscape and Man deepens channels, raises embankments, and puts the water where it will be of most use. God leaves Man a savage, and the pressure of social life civilises him. God left Man ignorant and humans developed knowledge. God dogs the feet of men and threatens their existence with noxious poisons while men guard each other in safety. Man's greatest helper is knowledge, and God puts every obstacle in the way of getting it. The whole lesson of religion and life is that Man and God cannot grow at the same time. Man rises the gods decline. That is the teaching of the whole of history.

We are pleased to register a victory at Leeds for Sunday shows and we hope it will encourage other places to sweep away the ridiculous Sunday laws. After all, closing "Sunday shows" will not drive people to Church; it merely robs them of harmless enjoyment.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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For "The Freethinker."—C. F. Simpson, £3 4s.; G. Swan, 1s. 6d.

R. SPIERS.—Many thanks for the block. Will be used at early date.

Will any reader be good enough to supply the office with "The Freethinker" for September 2, 1945. They are wanted for binding.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

Quite unnecessarily a Christian reader of "The Freethinker" reminds us that a great many scientists are Christians. We know it, and we should be surprised were it otherwise. But a man is only an authority so long as he is truthful, sane, and dealing with a subject concerning which he has knowledge and understanding. Let a man be ever so truthful and ever so profound, his authority is of no value concerning matters which are not and cannot be the common property of man. The opinion of the wisest of men may often be of no value at all. That is one of the reasons why all that has been said on the nature and existence of God has never taken farther human ability or human knowledge. Truth stands as truth whether "great" men agree or disagree.

The following item made its first appearance in the "American Methodist Magazine." It has been reprinted in the English "Methodist Recorder" with comments that merely prove the need of a better understanding of the issue raised. Still, it is something to find it published although it reflects little credit on the state of society. We may, later, criticise the "Recorder's" handling of the superstition of another life. For the time being here is the excerpt. The writer's name is not given:—

"I think before condemning fanatical and superstitious religionists I would make sure my own religion were free from fanaticism and superstition. Otherwise you'll be removing someone else's mote but ignoring your own beam. I refer to the oldest and most prevalent superstition in religion, belief in immortality. This belief, psychologically based on greed and carnality, has no place in modern theology, but almost all Methodist ministers believe it. Eternal life has been scientifically proved a fallacy because the spirit dies with its progenitor the brain. I am not trying to minimise the wonderful work of Methodist ministers and other Christian ministers the world over, I am pointing out to you one superstition in modern religion which needs eradication."

The comments of the writer in the "Methodist Recorder" merely illustrate how little is the religious press in this country affected by the scientific developments of recent years.

Next Sunday (February 17) Mr. F. J. Corina will speak for the Belfast Branch N.S.S. on "Freethought or Christianity?" in the Bakers' Hall, North Street, Belfast, at 7-30 p.m. Mr. Corina is sure of a friendly welcome and his direct and forceful manner will appeal to the increasing audiences eager to hear more of the message of Freethought.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. has been running a very successful course of Sunday afternoon lectures in the Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints. To-day, Mr. Joseph McCabe will speak on "Big Business in Religion" at 3 p.m., and the local saints are expecting another full house. The movement in Manchester is gaining in strength, the branch is in good hands, and an increasing influence can be expected.

The General Secretary's recent visit to Newcastle was a pronounced success. A large party sat down to an arranged tea, and the evening meeting in the Socialist Hall was packed with a number standing. Mr. J. T. Brighton, who has taken over the duties of secretary to the branch, was in the chair and contributed much towards the success of the day by his preliminary work behind the scenes. Outlying districts were well represented and enthusiasm was the keynote.

We see that the "Daily Express" is instituting an inquiry into the opinion of the general public regarding the use made of the radio by the B.B.C. We are not very sanguine in the results, not because the letters received will probably be varied and numerous, but because the "Daily Express" is likely to follow the example of the B.B.C. so far as the letters printed are concerned. The B.B.C. has openly declared that nothing which runs counter to established Christianity is to be entertained. But the crudest of arguments and statements in favour of Christianity are welcomed. Even in social matters the same methods are adopted. Social questions are announced, but the subjects set are of a very harmless character. All "dangerous" subjects are taboo and the method laid out by an Italian some centuries ago is adopted. Keep the young people discussing things that do not matter and existing wrongs will be saved. Apart from entertainments, music, plays and the like, the B.B.C. is one of the best instruments to avoid new ideas and perpetuate long-standing abuses. The pity of it is that so many men of learning and wisdom should lend themselves to become tools of the B.B.C. But we suppose the advertising value of the "talks," etc., is very great and not many have the moral courage to withstand the temptation.

Every Christian priest follows the teachings of Jesus—or promises to do so. And every Christian priest promises to take Jesus as a guide. But one thing that Jesus said was that when a man strikes a Christian on one cheek the assaulted person should turn to his enemy the other cheek. But it appears that the teaching of Jesus is not binding, for one of his representatives on earth, the Rev. F. H. Cook of Hooton, Cheshire, differs from his Lord and Master, and in his Church magazine he says that many magistrates are unworthy of their post because they refuse to give youthful evil-doers the cat. So we leave this good priest who is paid to preach Christianity and the magistrate to fight out the matter. It looks as if one of them should have the sack.

Says the Rev. L. Ashby of the "Telegraph": "No man should be condemned because he cannot believe, provided that his doubts are genuine." That will really not do. There is no such thing as dishonest doubt. A man either has a doubt or he has not. But it is neither honest nor dishonest. He may be a liar, but that is nothing that is startling in any body of Christians. Moreover the New Testament makes no such qualification. The teaching on that point is quite clear and simple, and that is, "He that believeth shall be saved." Of course that makes the New Testament passage very foolish and Mr. Ashby ought to know better. But he probably feels that not many people read his little sermon, and he may get into trouble when he stands before the Throne.

A VISITOR FROM MARS

ON a charming June evening a young man named Ronald Finlayson was sitting on a boulder at the lower end of a heather-clad glen in the Western Isles. In passing it should be added this young man was the son of a crofter, a graduate of a Scottish University with first-class honours in natural philosophy. He was a deep thinker, and his cultured mind could not be reconciled to the religious and political opinion of his day.

The sky was clear overhead, with the sun curving down on the Western horizon in all her golden glory and the air was warm and genial. There was no sign of human habitation to be seen.

Incidentally he happened to glance overhead at the azure blue of the sky when he noticed a dark speck right above him at a great height. Naturally he riveted his attention on this object, when, to his surprise, he saw that it was approaching in his direction and, to his amazement, in a few minutes it landed gently on a green patch twenty yards from where he was sitting.

He got up at once and walked down to this strange object. It resembled the body of a plane without wings. As he approached, the door on the side nearest to him opened and a tall, handsome, fair-haired young man slipped out and stood facing Ronald with a smiling gaze. This young man was dressed in a suit of vivid green, beautifully cut, and remarked that it was a good evening, to which Finlayson replied "Yes, Sir," and added, "Where did you come from?" "You will no doubt be startled to hear that I came from Mars," and continued, "you will also be surprised to learn that, for a long term of years, the population of Mars have been studying the activities, general beliefs, culture, science and philosophy of mankind in your world."

He went on: "We have conquered space, and we are sorry to note your misrule and misbelief are principally responsible for the misery, poverty and brutality at large in your world.

"The chief cause of all your trouble is due to the numerous systems of cults and religions you have in your world, hating, killing and burning each other, ending in bloody warfare. Your religious systems are a curse to humanity. Yet this mass murder is carried on in the name of your God. If God, as it is said, is all powerful why did he not prevent these religious wars. Above all, why did he not make the human family to adopt a single ethical system of religion for the whole world, from pole to pole? Imagine then the harmony which would prevail in your world. Again, I say, why did he not adopt a single religion for your planet and Him, as said already, all powerful? The only logical answer to this problem is, that he must be a devil, and not a loving God. Logic, truth and reason pin us down to this view. But, strange to relate, mankind seems to be blind to this fact."

"No," butted in Ronald, "I saw years ago, the inconsistency or, rather, the stupidity of our religious and political outlook on life." "Yes, I know," replied the visitor from Mars, "it is because of your advanced views that I was sent to see you." Ronald then asked him to let him know the religious and economic systems they have in Mars. "The religious and economic systems we have in Mars are totally different from yours. We have no class distinction, nor money as you have in circulation. We substituted service for money, we are governed by a single law all over the world, the whole population is in unity. Everybody has to work to produce food, clothes, houses, etc., etc. Due to this combined unity the working hours are reduced to three hours per day, and, thereafter, men and women are free to follow various recreations.

"Children and young people are kept in school until they are eighteen years of age. We have also our universities like yours, where science and philosophy, etc., are taught. We have no poverty, everybody has plenty to eat of the best possible food, and dressed in the best clothes and housed in lovely dwellings. We have stores where everything is kept for the use of the people; where the housewife produces not money but a card, showing that her husband has worked the regulation number of hours for the day or week as the case might be.

"Now we have really no religion like yours. True enough, we follow an ethical system which we strictly adhere to, i.e., we evade evil and follow good. That is surely all that man can do, which sharply defines the difference between right and wrong. Briefly, our religion is 'Truth, Goodness and Beauty.' We know nothing about the Hereafter, which is unknowable and therefore beyond the ken of man. But, as already said, you believe that your God is omnipotent, that He is all powerful, a perfect deity. Now, a perfect being is conditionless, we cannot add anything to or detract anything from his perfection. Why then do you worship and pray to him? Your King now and again sets a Sunday apart for a day of national prayer, to ask God to help you to win, say, the late war. Now let us come to definite conclusions by what we mean by prayer. Petitional prayer involves that, unless we ask God to do something for us, He would not do it, in other words we assume that his memory is defective, which, in a perfect being, would be unthinkable. Man has created a God after his own image—a sort of glorified man. Yet, according to your Bible, this paragon of perfection can be moved to jealousy, anger and wrath. These traits in the character of God are purely human weaknesses. God is unknowable—a non-human, and non-finite entity—and as I have already said beyond the ken of man. When one goes outside the realm of conscience and experience, one loses his intellectual bearing and course on an uncharted ocean."

Ronald was greatly impressed by what he heard and observed: "According to your philosophy it is illogical to pray to and worship a perfect being." "Yes," he said, "That is correct." Ronald then remarked: "Who then are we to pray to and worship in this world?" The man from Mars said: "You have to pray to your own heart, to shun evil and follow good. You are to worship Truth, Beauty and Goodness. But, before leaving you, I should like to point out that your greed for gold and lust for power is devastating and boundless, and conquers every obstacle in its way, but I shall leave this matter without any further comments, beyond adding it is a plague in your world.

"We have conquered disease in Mars and old age. Look at me and tell me, How old do you think I am?" Ronald gazed at him for a few seconds and said: "About twenty-three years." "Well," he said, "you are wrong, I am one hundred years old, and I have sixty years to go before the end comes; not only that, but when the time comes for me to depart this life, the fear of death will be superseded by the desire to die, with all my faculties in tact. We die of a physiological old age.

"In your world you die of a pathological old age, that is why you are afraid of death, because you die before your time.

"Mars is much colder than your earth because it is much farther away from the sun. We live above ground for only three months in Summer. Thereafter we go below the ground where we have cities and towns all lit by artificial suns, and these suns have all the rays of the natural sun. So, while living underground the artificial suns keep the temperature warm and comfortable. We have thousands of miles of underground territory where we plant and grow all the food we require. The agricultural areas are watered by artificial means, and due to the underground suns we have a uniform climate and no crop failures. Our system is what you would term an El Dorado or exquisite Elysian fields of enchantment. We have only one language which enhances the peace and harmony of our existence. Finally, let me again point out to you that religion's lust for power and greed for gold are responsible for all your mis-rule, ending in war, bloodshed, poverty and sordid existence.

Ronald at this stage thanked the stranger for his interesting information and said: "I shall follow the lead you gave me." Then the man from Mars left Ronald and slipped into his machine, and next moment rose into the blue abyss of a June sky and disappeared into the void.

DR. NORMAN MORRISON, F.Z.S.

AN ATHEIST'S "ESSAYS"

MR. WOOLSEY TELLER'S latest volume, "Essays of an Atheist" (Price 2 dollars), a collection chosen from those he has contributed to the New York "Truth Seeker" over a period of years, will appeal particularly to those who love controversy and hard-hitting. Mr. Teller is a bonnie fighter, he asks for no quarter from religionists, and he gives none. He has made it his business to go for humbug, credulity and superstition, and he is there wherever they are found be they Philosophy, Fundamentalism, Christian Humanism, Scientific muddling, Spiritualism, or what-not. It is only fair to say that these essays have appealed to me so much that I found it difficult to put the volume down. Indeed, there is very little in which I can disagree with Mr. Teller for he has put into plain, blunt words a number of things, perhaps highly controversial, with which I am heartily in accord. I agree, for example, in his championship of the white races as superior to the brown, red, yellow and black—though Rationalists often contend for equality in almost everything, given similar environment. Some of their arguments stagger me.

I am entirely with Mr. Teller in his Materialism—he quotes with approval Jacques Loeb, "Modern physics is mechanistic. . . Since no discontinuity exists between the matter constituting living and non-living bodies, biology must also be mechanistic." Adds Mr. Teller: "Real physics has done something more than 'split' the atom. It has blasted metaphysics sky-high and annihilated the pretensions of religion." He has no use for a good deal of philosophy either. Rightly or wrongly, world-famous names like Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, the two Bacons, Hegel, and many others, are treated with precious little respect whenever Mr. Teller feels that they are uttering drivel. Here are two specimens of philosophy which rouse in him fierce ire:—

"Philosophy shows that the Idea advances to an infinite antithesis; that, viz., between the Idea in its free, universal form—in which it exists for itself—and the contrasted form of abstract introversion, reflection on itself, which is formal existence-for-itself, personality, formal freedom, such as belongs to Spirit only. . ."—HEGEL.

"The prehensions of the concretescent subject and the formal constitutions of the members of the contemporary nexus which is the chair-image are thus conditioned by the properties of the same environment in the past. . . A reference to the Category of Transmutation will show that perception of the contemporary 'images' in the mode of 'presentational immediacy' is an 'impure prehension' . . ."

—PROF. WHITEHEAD.

"Make no mistake regarding Whitehead," adds Mr. Teller, "he is 'tops' to-day in philosophic circles, and there are few of the ancients who could have jumbled things as thoroughly as he."

This treatment of philosophy is thoroughly irreverent and unashamed, and what he says about the other subjects I have named is even more blasphemous—and necessary. At all events, I am heartily with him.

Naturally, he has a word to say on the Jesus-myth problem, admitting at the same time that he "has never given serious thought or essential study to what is called the 'historicity of Jesus' question." For him and those who think like him, it certainly does not matter "two straws" whether Jesus lived or not. For Christians it is of the supremest importance. And that is why I am on the mythicist side.

On one subject alone I beg to differ very strongly from Mr. Teller, and that is on the subject of vivisection. He is in favour of it; I, in common with Ingersoll, Mark Twain, G. W. Foote, and many other Freethinkers, am bitterly opposed to all experiments on animals.

H. CUTNER.

OBITUARY

EMILY GALE.

It is with deep regret that we record the death of Emily Gale of Six Bells, Abertillery, Monmouthshire, which took place on January 24 in her 75th year, from bronchitis. For many years she, her husband, and family, followed the Freethought point of view and were regular readers of "The Freethinker," and the domestic circle was one in which mutual regard and affection reigned. The funeral took place on Tuesday, January 29, in the peaceful mountain cemetery at Abertillery where before an assembly of sorrowing members of the family, relatives and friends, the General Secretary N.S.S., by special request, read a Secular Service.

R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., S. K. RATCLIFFE: "Optimism and Realism." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., Dr. E. J. DINGWALL, M.A., B. ABBY COLLINS, and a member of the public.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. R. B. MITCHELL: "The Rocky Road to Secularism."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Dr. C. A. SMITH: "That the Family Will Disappear."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. JOSEPH McCABE: "Big Business in Religion."

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

What is the Use of Prayer? Delty and Design. Did Jesus Christ Exist? Agnosticism or . . . ? Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. Atheism, Freethought and the Child. Christianity and Slavery. The Devil. What is Freethought? Must We have a Religion? Morality Without God. Gods and their Makers. The Church's Fight for the Child. Price 2d. each. Postage 1d. each.

MATERIALISM RESTATED, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST, by C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; by post 5d.

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, by Lady (Robert) Simon. Price, post free, 2s. 8d.

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

THE RUINS, OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES, to which is added THE LAW OF NATURE. By C. F. Voiney. A Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an introduction. Price, post free, 3s. 2d.

WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD? By C. G. L. Du Cann. An enquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

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

LOOKING AROUND

SOME talkers get as far as "seeing themselves," but only "as others see them." This is sufficient if their object is merely the exploitation of those "others." A modern teacher of Philosophy should assimilate a much higher ethic, which is "Man, know thyself." He should acquire this knowledge as early as possible, at least before he publishes his wanderings in search of a philosophy of life. Without this he is not qualified to lead.

Such a one has just had published his gropings after a philosophy, and for about thirty-five years he believed that perfection was natural to Man. Although he thought he was a Rationalist, yet he believed perfection existed, or at least was attainable by Man, and that the millennium was just around the corner. Along with other stupid notions (which he acquired during those long years) he now says he "flatly disbelieves all this." As his "philosophy" all tumbles down he seems quite bewildered, so he gives up his mental acrobatics and returns to the Faith of his childhood: Man is not perfect, therefore Original Sin is true and Evil is endemic in Man. If Evil is endemic, so is Good, but he does not mention the Good. There can be no concept of one without the other. It is the same with heat and cold, high and low, east and west. Although he abandons modern delusions, that is merely negative. Progress is positive, and to drop some modern nonsense just to substitute ancient myths is not progress. He has told us that the arguments for Atheism and Determinism are unanswerable; yet he always believed in Freewill because he "felt it in his bones." Perhaps "he thinketh in his heart" instead of using his head. Now he says that the stirring of his emotions is the voice of God calling him. He admits setting aside reason and giving place to emotion. If (as he admits) he has always believed contrary to his reason, he must have a very religious mind, for nothing can be more religious than that. It seems he has always carried about the ghost of a God and a sort of Soul.

The ancient philosophers had original thoughts and formulated theories. Some had practical value and are still verified by all experience, but this guide in philosophy admits his effeminacy and some silly blunders. In answering his critics he claims that his confession is a virtue; and it would be so if he showed that he had objective reality as a sound basis for a new philosophy.

It is rather hard to believe that a public speaker could be so very credulous. Such simplicity is usually associated with the most illiterate. He has told us how much he values popularity, and that an element in such advancement is to be laughed at; but whenever did a buffoon become a philosopher, a great thinker? Of course, some have been popular enough to earn big incomes and also astute enough to resign before receiving official intimation; and pretending to ignore very plain speaking from the members, the ferocity of which was emphasised by its extreme courtliness. He offers as defence for his gyrations that there are others quite as bad, and asks: Are any of his critics perfect? tacitly he invites criticism, apparently anything for advertisement.

The normal person is started as a child in the Fairyland of imagination. Later, by the observation of verifiable facts, he grows up to appreciate real things; there is no necessity to seek a second childhood. But here is one who seems to think he can enter the old home by simulating infantile credulity. He will be rather late, if seeking attachment to some Sect, because their prosperity is waning. There are still some very peculiar parties and they are certainly in need of new and effective advertisement.

Instead of the old-style converted burglar or drunkard (this used to be a great attraction) it could be modernised by the converted Rationalist Teacher of Philosophy, the boy that never

grew up. He knows well enough he is inviting critics to say he must always have been religious, at least in his outlook. Probably he thinks that will help him to get attached to some that will prove more useful than the Rationalists; but why should he expect them to be much upset and to say he "is a good man gone wrong." He never was right, and this on his own admission.

MJLEROI.

THE MEANING OF MORALITY

ONE of the problems which have always pressed upon Freethinkers is the way in which morality (the code of decent behaviour) can be completely dissociated from those outworn supernatural notions with which it has become so entangled. There have, in fact, been all too few attempts by Freethinkers to evolve a satisfactory code of morals, free from all supernatural sanctions. A recent pamphlet suggests one way in which this problem can be tackled, although there are many things said in it with which all Freethinkers will not necessarily be in agreement.

Entitled "Anarchism and Morality," this pamphlet is written by George Woodcock, and published at twopence by the "Freedom Press." It is one of the most "meaty" productions that has appeared for many a long day, and it is worth far more than the very reasonable price which is charged for it. I advise all Freethinkers who are interested in the question to get a copy for themselves, since it is not easy in a very brief review to give more than the gist of the argument which Mr. Woodcock advances.

Expressed briefly, it is this: practically all the theoretical moral axioms in which we are supposed to believe are based on mistaken ideas of the supernatural or on a legalistic and personified State which is really only a means for a ruling class to maintain its power. Yet there can be no doubt that the majority of people act decently towards each other in their social contacts, and if belief in the supernatural were destroyed, a natural morality would eventually come into being which would render the present mass of punitive laws, courts, and police unnecessary. Kropotkin's famous "Mutual Aid" is quoted to some end, in order to show that this natural morality is to be found even in the animal kingdom, and that it would, given proper circumstances, extend its range so as to cover the whole of human life. Godwin, in his "Political Justice," also provided pointers which suggest how this could be brought into effect.

Now, all this may seem remote in the age of power-politics and the police State in which we live; it is not necessarily so. All the ideologies which we take so readily for granted are based on a practical and theoretical structure, which utilises current ideas of morality and religion as valuable means of keeping the masses in their place. Hence the edifying spectacle of the Chairman of the Tory Party mingling with the bishops and supporting a scheme for evangelising the country, re-infecting it with the disease of supernaturalism from which it is so near to throwing off. This problem of natural or supernatural morality is therefore of some practical importance, and it cannot be neglected by anyone who wishes for real freedom for all. Alike in the capitalist U.S.A., in the slightly Socialist British Isles, and in the so-called Communist U.S.S.R. we have precepts of morality enforced on the people from above. Only when morality is based on natural lines and evolved from below can we hope that much of the unhappiness and neurosis of the present day will disappear.

S. H.