

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWES AND OPINIONS

### Our Clergy

I HAVE been accused of being illogical because I am constantly holding up the clergy to scorn. Why, I am asked, should I, an Atheist, expect the clergy to be better than other folk? And if I do not expect to find them approaching to perfection, why should I attack them for being no better than other folk? I suppose that the best plan is to plead guilty, but with considerations that may lead to a pardon. To begin, I do not expect the clergy to be better than other folk. As the world goes we really have no right to quarrel with the clergy because they ask for increases in their salaries and pensions. Everybody, from Prime Minister to street sweeper, has been on that game. In that direction my complaint against the clergy is, I think, a legitimate one, for I am compelled to pay taxes from which the Churches are free. Apart from these helps from the State, and the forced contributions of non-Christians to the upkeep of churches and chapels, etc., the clergy are much on the level with other people. I am in this matter in the same position as the boy who said he had no objection to fleas being alive, but he protested against the way they get their living.

No, emphatically. I do not expect clergy to be better than others. I never expected them to be so. The clergy, like other folk, wear the stamp of their occupation in their dress, their manners, and their peculiar sense of right and wrong. They were not different from other folk before they resolved to lend God Almighty a hand to keep the world going in the desired direction, and I do not believe they are very different because they wear their collars buttoned at the back of their necks instead of in the front, and develop an adenoidal accent. Men take to the Church for much the same reasons that young men adopt this or that occupation. The clergy have the same vices and virtues that other people have. If one were to take five hundred clergymen and mix them up with the same number of non-clergymen he would find the same proportion of good and bad, of humbug and honesty.

But there is one important thing to bear in mind. Fundamentally, human nature runs along a common road. Status, education, poverty, wealth, the form of the education received, all these and many other factors operate, and in substance cannot be materially altered. One would not, for instance, expect the same proportion of pick-pockets in a wealthy quarter as in a poor one. On the other hand, the slums are comparatively free from the selling of worthless stock shares. Drunken men would be about equal in all classes, but with less excuse for it in wealthy districts than in poor ones. There are ways of getting drunk in the West that are not so commonly found in the East. So one might run through a long list of

examples proving that there is a deal of one-ness in the human race. Mrs. O'Grady and the Major's lady have very much in common.

So when we have overcome the glamour of the medicine man, and intelligent people are not impressed with the fantastic dresses of the Roman Catholic medicine man, we shall realise that a parson is a very ordinary kind of person, and then we may expect to find religion take its proper place in a scientifically arranged museum.

There is another aspect of my subject, a very important one, particularly important for those who are fond of stressing the financial aspect of the religious situation. As I have said I do not believe that the financial motive is quite so strong among religious leaders as some people appear to believe. I believe the psychological factor to be far more important. The need for food, shelter and clothing man shares with the rest of the animal world. But the capacity for looking beyond and behind, the creation of dominating super-natural powers, the transmission of ideas in the form of inventions, institutions, and verbal instruction are things that specifically mark off the human from the animal group. Ideas and ideals, the submission of the individual to the traditions of his tribe, the desire of the individual to stand high in the opinion of his fellows become increasingly powerful factors in human evolution. What the tribe has thought the individual re-thinks with certain variations, few in primitive life, but becoming more numerous and fruitful as society develops.

Readers will know for how many years, and how persistently, I have stressed the understanding of this aspect of human evolution. I am the more pleased to find the same point of view taken up by that very brilliant thinker, Bertrand Russell, who has the capacity for importing science into his philosophy and philosophy into his science. In his book "Power," he says:—

"The fundamental concept in social science is power in the safe sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics. Like energy power has many forms such as wealth, armaments, civil authority, influence on opinion. No one of these can be regarded as subordinate to any other, and there is no one form from which the others are derivative. The attempt to treat one form of power, say wealth, in isolation, can only be partially successful, just as the study of one form of energy will be defective at certain points, unless other forms are taken into account. Wealth may result from military power or from influence over opinion, just as either of these may result from wealth. The laws of social dynamics are laws which can only be stated in terms of this or that power. In former time military power was isolated, with the consequence that victory or defeat appeared to depend upon the accidental qualities of commanders. In our

day it is common to treat economic power as the source from which all others are derived; this . . . is just as great an error as that of the purely military historian whom it has caused to seem out of date. . . . To revert to the analogy of physics, power, like energy must be regarded as continually passing from one of its forms into any other, and it should be the business of science to seek the laws of such transformations. The attempt to isolate any one form of power, more especially in our day, the economic form, has been, and still is, a source of great practical importance. . . . When a moderate degree of comfort is assured, both individuals and communities will pursue power rather than wealth as a means to power, or they may forgo an increase of wealth in order to secure an increase of power, but in the former case as in the latter their fundamental motive is not economic."

The fundamental factor in *human* life is not the physical, but the psychological one. The craving for money appeals when money is the symbol of power or ability. Abolish that form of distinction and another will take its place. In this country there is evidence that the economic motive is not always supreme, even though it may often be present. Men and women will fight for distinctive office in Government, in local bodies, in trade organisations, in art, in science, in music, in literature. They will lose their lives for the most apparently useless cause, and it is well that this should be so. When men and women have lost the capacity for struggle against power, to fight for a forlorn hope, to criticise new and old ideas, to approve and denounce, when these qualities are no longer manifest then humanity will be on the downward march.

What has been said should, I think, express a sane, even scientific summing-up of the position of the clergy.\* It is probably true that a great number of the present-day clergy take themselves quite seriously and actually feel that ordination does really lift them above the level of their fellows. And that in itself gives many an officiating nitwit a sense of his own superiority that could not exist were he brought face to face with himself. The habit of interpreting every phase of feeling as a sign of "divine" guidance is one that is easily acquired, and nothing is plainer than the ease with which family, national, or international affairs are taken as continuous proof of divine help as seen in the non-religious as well as in the religious world; if they could not be so traced they would not be present in religious circles. The golden rule here is to remember that there is not a situation which is called religious that cannot be paralleled by one that is admittedly in the world of non-religion.

The only remarkable thing about the completely honest priest is that so ancient a figure should have persisted for so long. I recall once conducting a party of young men on an educational tour over the Kensington natural history museum. During that tour we encountered a party of clergymen evidently on the same errand. I had for a moment a feeling similar to what I might have had if one of the extinct animals arrayed before me had suddenly come to life. I realised that I was face to face with a survival of one of the most primitive types of human character.

But more important than the medicine-man's opinion of himself is the opinion of the people concerning the medicine-

man. This survival of the primitive did once occupy the most important of all positions in the human group. He was in touch with the gods, he was able to state their wishes and to protect men from their anger. In some form that feeling towards the priest still lingers. Among the Roman Catholics we have it in its most brazen form. In other directions the conviction of the parson being in some way different from ordinary folk lingers. He has still special privileges, and in a vague way there is abroad a feeling that a parson ought to be a better man than others. That is an historic blunder, an anthropological error. The function of the priest is not to set mankind an example in conduct, and certainly not in intelligence. Most of them are to-day driven to that pose because life has moralised religion and also its representatives. The parson to-day has a place as a museum piece for those who understand him and his functions. He is an interesting study for those who appreciate his quality. Modified as he is, humanised as he is, moralised as he is by the impact of civilised thinking, he remains, as a priest, the survival of a type of character that might well have ceased to exist many generations ago.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## AN INSURGENT SON OF ITALY

GIORDANO BRUNO in his "De Monade" forecasted his own fate when he wrote: "Victory lies in the hands of Fate. Be that with me as it may, whoever shall prove conqueror, future ages will not deny, that I did not fear to die, was second to none in constancy, and preferred a spirited death to a craven life."

This dauntless Freethought martyr was born at Nola, near Naples, in 1548. He entered a Dominican monastery and was ordained, but soon became a convert to the Copernican theory that the sun and not the earth is the centre of the solar system. He studied Nicholas of Cusa, admired Lully and venerated the Epicurean poet, Lucretius.

Thus, his orthodoxy was shattered. He queried the truth of transubstantiation, and the immaculate conception, while his doubts deepened with his perusal of Erasmus. Nor did he consider the views of Arius as damnable as the Church declared. Naturally he was watched with suspicion and was soon threatened with prosecution. He then fled from his monastery and journeyed to Rome. Thereafter, he spent sixteen adventurous years in wandering over the European Continent, visited England where he was well received, and perhaps experienced the happiest years of his life.

Bruno came to England with the king's approval after serving under Henry III. of France in 1583. He lectured on controversial themes at Oxford and in London he successfully expounded the heliocentric doctrines of Copernicus and contravened the teachings of the Church, which made our tiny planet the centre of the universe.

Seven works of Bruno were published in London, and Hermann Kesten notes in his highly illuminating "Copernicus and his World" (Secker and Warburg, 1945, 408 pp.; 21s.) "Bruno was the first to give public lectures in England on Copernicus and his doctrines. In London, he frequented Sir Philip Sidney, a man of letters and courtier, and his friend Fulke Greville, one of Queen Elizabeth's lovers. (He may also have met Bacon; Shakespeare, however, in a few passages in *Troilus and Cressida*, *King John* and the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, describes the earth as motionless in the centre of the Universe.)"

Bruno returned to France in 1585 accompanied by Castellan, the French Ambassador. He went to Marburg, but his

reputation prevented his teaching there, but he was allowed to lecture at Wittenberg. At Prague he unsuccessfully solicited the aid of the Emperor Rudolph who later, however, supported Tycho Brahe and Kepler in their astronomical investigations. At Frankfort Bruno was denied all intercourse with his printer so he went to Zurich but only to return to Frankfort.

Now came Bruno's shameful betrayal. Mocenigo, a secret agent of the Inquisition, enticed Bruno to Venice, there to serve as his preceptor in 1591. All humanist Europe was astounded to learn that the Pantheistic apostle had placed himself in the clutches of his enemies. For the treacherous Mocenigo soon threatened him, denounced him, attacked him, fettered him, locked him up in his cellar and delivered him to the hangmen of the Inquisition in May, 1592."

Thus, after long years' weary wanderings, Bruno was immured for eight mournful years in the revolting dungeons of the Inquisition, first in Venice and then in Rome. During his trial in Venice he expounded his philosophy to the scandalised Court.

Bruno's doctrines were never intended for the masses and only reached them indirectly, if at all. His rejection of revealed religion and his pantheistic teachings constituted him a pestilent heretic. But, as Kesten claims, "he did influence Spinoza, perhaps Molière and Shakespeare, Leibnitz, and surely Hegel, Schelling and Goethe."

Bruno was certainly not a scientific materialist. He was part mystic and part philosopher. Still, he was anathema to the Inquisition whose function it was to fetter the intellect of Europe. Its procedure, observes our historian, "was secret, its victims vanished as if swallowed up by the ground and reappeared only dressed in a shirt on the way to the stake, escorted by priests brandishing torches and droning hymns. Any imbecile could write a denunciation against anybody, the Inquisition accepted every denunciation gratefully, the accused never learned the names of the accusers and the witnesses, and usually not even the nature of his alleged or real crime."

The turpitude of this infamous tribunal was intensified by the fact that all the witnesses and officials of the Inquisition were sworn to perpetual silence. The prosecutor himself acted as judge. No one could appear on the accused's behalf. Worned and worn out by endless questionings, then tortured into confession, a fiery death usually awaited the man who dared to think for himself.

Kesten concludes that Bruno "was the first, since the triumph of Christianity, openly to return to the independence of the Greek thinkers. Against the theologians, he demanded the right to freedom of thought and speech. He took his wisdom where he found it, from the heathens, the Jews, the Christians, even from the Cabala."

Among the charges urged against Bruno was the crime of having praised Elizabeth of England and other heretical princes; of having denied the virgin birth of Jesus and with having been guilty of other heinous offences including that of having escaped the custody of the Roman Inquisition in the past.

Thus, the Venetian inquiry, and in 1592 the Papal Inquisition demanded Bruno's extradition. After some delay this was conceded and in 1593 the philosopher disappeared into the torture chambers of the Roman tribunal. For years he was lost to the world, for his only visitors were Inquisitors and torturers and only in 1599 was he brought to trial.

Bruno proved intractable to all blandishment and threats. He denied the charge that his writings were heretical and declared that the Inquisitors were calumniators. Of course he was condemned, unfrocked, and excommunicated, and consigned to the secular authorities for the flames. Kesten records the evidence of a contemporary: "When all these things were done," writes Caspar Schopp, a freshly converted Catholic and eye witness, "he said not a word except in a menacing way." "Perchance your fear in passing judgment upon me is greater than mine in receiving it."

Bruno's martyrdom is also recorded in another document cited by our historian. All appeals to recant were futile. His Jesuit and Dominican exhorters he treated with lofty disdain. And the record continues: "He stood firm throughout and to the end in his accursed obstinacy, setting his brain and mind to a thousand errors and vainglorings; and he continued steadfastly stubborn while conducted by the Servants of Justice to the Campo di Fiori, and there being stripped and bound to a stake, was burned alive. Throughout, our Brotherhood sang litanies and the Consolers exhorted him to the very last to overcome his obstinacy. But thus ended his agony and his wretched life."

Bruno's chief offence, like that of the later Galileo, was his affirmation of our earth's motion and his claim that there were other worlds than ours. Copernicus was the master who inspired him to postulate a mighty cosmogony. With Rheticus, Bruno agreed that a new dispensation in science and philosophy had been inaugurated by the majestic Copernicus. Osiander's grovelling preface to Copernicus' *magnum opus* Bruno rightly regarded as a forgery, so he termed Osiander "an ignorant and presumptuous ass."

Bruno's astronomical system was comparatively modern. His universe was infinite and eternal. If his suns and planets have their day and disappear, their substance reappears in new combinations. "There is only one heaven," he said, "an immeasurable domain of light-giving and illuminated bodies." The substance of the universe is pervaded by a universal soul. God ranges through the cosmos, its divine cause, unity and principle in which all antagonisms are reconciled. God and nature are identical. So we worship him best by studying nature's laws.

Bruno's vast extension of the Copernican system was unfavourably received by contemporary Copernicans. For while Copernicus had removed the stars to an immense distance, he still regarded them as fixtures in the sky, while the sun remained the universe's centre, whereas Bruno reduced the sun to a star among countless other stars.

Bruno's monument was erected on the Field of Flowers in which he was martyred. It was unveiled in the presence of an immense audience in which European science, art and letters were all represented. The Catholic Church bitterly resented this reminder of her past misdeeds. Nor was she better pleased when the great poet Swinburne termed her a withered harlot, and Church of name abhorred.

"Pope Leo XIII," writes our author, "spent the entire day on his knees before the image of St. Peter, fasting and praying. He denounced the runaway monk, Giordano Bruno, as 'a man of impure and abandoned life: a double renegade, a heretic formally condemned, whose obstinacy against the Church endured unbroken even to his last breath. He possessed no remarkable scientific knowledge, for his own writings condemn him of a degraded materialism and show that he was entangled in commonplace errors.'"

Like many other Popes, Leo XIII. seems to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. Still, in later years the Church strove for the statue's removal, but even the Fascist Mussolini refused to respond to the Vatican's request.

T. F. PALMER.

## TO THE LORD DIRECT

WE Freethinkers, I often think, are apt to take the other chap's religion a little too seriously. Perhaps one reason for this is a sort of unconscious fear of "blaspheming," or getting in the way of the Law. Over 100 years ago, poor Robert Taylor (who was, by the way, in sheer intellectual power head and shoulders above his Christian ex-comrades) served three years hard for poking what we would now consider very harmless fun at the Lord; and, in any case, the law against "blasphemy" still stands.

As far as I can see it is just as blasphemous to criticise religion seriously as it is to poke fun at it, for in both cases the intention

is the same. But no Christian worth his salt can stand his beliefs being laughed at, and we must not expect anything less than the rigid application of the Law from him whenever he gets the chance—which is, all the same, not very often these days.

Satire is to religion what the atom bomb is to war, as the great humorous writers easily found out. Even Charles Dickens, who always remained a Christian at heart, did Christianity immeasurable harm with his presentation of the Rev. Mr. Chadband and the Rev. Mr. Stiggins—two portraits still being perpetuated by the B.B.C. You remember Mr. Chadband in "Bleak House":—

"My friends . . . Peace be on this house! On the master thereof, on the mistress thereof, on the young maidens, and on the young men! My friends, why do I wish for peace? What is peace? Is it war? No. Is it strife? No. Is it lovely, and gentle, and beautiful, and pleasant, and serene, and joyful? O, yes! Therefore, my friends, I wish for peace upon you and upon yours."

Some of the oily gentlemen who give us extra special religious discourses over the air would find that little disquisition exactly to their taste—if they only knew it. Quite frankly, indeed, I never hear Mr. C. S. Lewis, for example, without thinking of Chadband; and certainly that is the case with both the religious ladies and gentlemen who never miss these days an opportunity of rubbing in our "responsibility" for the atom bomb.

Lucian's "Dialogues of the Gods" and many of Voltaire's pamphlets are perfect examples of satire against religion, and some of the very little known lectures of Robert Taylor prove that he also knew what a formidable weapon it was against the solemnity of humbug—and ignorance.

I have a suspicion that the Rev. Brewin Grant in his many debates and encounters with Freethinkers during the middle of last century knew all this very well, and decided to turn the tables on his opponents. Faced with a quite humourless Holyoake, he never ceased to raise a laugh even against some of his own "sacred" positions if it helped him to score a point; and there is no doubt that he persuaded a lot of people to believe that he utterly discomfited the "infidel" and Freethought positions with his biting and often savage humour. I hasten to add, however, that Grant was, all the same, never liked even by his own people—his departure from religion's solemn and oily unction was highly distasteful to his fellow Christians.

All this brings me to a little work first written some years ago and now re-published under the title of "God and Me," which should appeal to all of us if only because of its departure from the stock way of dealing with Theism. Its author (who can be very serious indeed when it is necessary) has enjoyed for over 50 years a reputation for dealing, with a light touch, with the most devout and saintly beliefs. He has always had such supreme contempt for priest-ridden hocus-pocus that he is never happier than when gently but very thoroughly exposing its hopeless absurdities.

After all, if people can pray to the Lord why not write him direct? Letters are just as surely likely to reach the heavenly presence as even the most devout of prayers—and just as surely to be answered. It was a great idea, and in Mr. Chapman Cohen's hands these letters have a sparkle and a wit which must have caused even the Deity to smile if such a supposition is not blasphemy to contemplate.

It is refreshing sometimes to get away from involved theistic arguments whether they are of the a posteriori or of the a priori type. It is quite impossible to compute how many books have been written, ponderous and exquisitely solemn, to prove that a perfectly mythical God exists, and they continue to pour out of the religious press unceasingly. That their arguments have been proved utterly futile can be seen in the way the great majority of people ignore both God and his ways in their daily life. They are bored with him. More and more they realise he has done nothing whatever for them—if he exists; and while few

people say outright that he does *not* exist, most act as if there is no more a God Almighty in the skies than a Devil in the bowels of the earth.

How serious is the position is shown daily by the B.B.C. whose religious speakers are almost frantic at the perfect indifference of the ordinary man and woman to divine obligations. Even sacred sing-songs appeal only to a miserable few in comparison with those who lustily join in whenever the "Lily of Laguna" or "A Bicycle Made for Two" make their appearance. These earthly-minded heathens, though brought up to believe in the Christian faith, are more and more a problem to the saintly and pious sponsors of an out-worn Deity.

Whether in "God and Me," the "Me" gets the better of the "God" or vice-versa, the reader must find out for himself—though, as far as I am concerned, God seems to get a very rough passage in the intellectual encounter. Logic has never been a quality looming large in deistic characteristics, gods almost always preferring to beat an opponent with dire threats of Hell and Damnation. That was the Hitler way, and not even his bitterest enemy can accuse the German Fuehrer of not humbly following in the footsteps of his Master.

But of course there is something more behind "God and Me" than a little healthy satire and fun. Just as in the work of all the great satirists there was always a serious purpose, so if the reader looks behind the humour he will find an unanswerable indictment of the whole Theistic position—whether that is the point of view of a dear little Salvation Army lassie who can't think, or that of a famous physicist like Sir James Jeans.

God Almighty is "fading out." His defenders are becoming fewer and fewer, and in the face of an obstinate indifference even the terrific battery employed by the B.B.C. is hardly causing a tremor in the Atheistic position. And to that most desirable end, "God and Me" has contributed its quota of deadly ammunition. It is a little work which no Freethinker can afford to miss from his bookshelves.

H. CUTNER.

## GENIUS AND SHAKESPEARE

LET us understand exactly what I wish to discuss. First, always, what I am *not* writing about, the authorship of the plays usually attributed to William Shakespeare. So don't start "Bacon" when I say at the outset that I am firmly convinced the Stratford-on-Avon rustic didn't write the immortal poems and plays attributed to him.

It is surprising how much is taken for granted in this regard by rationalists who submit the authenticity of the Gospels to critical scrutiny. The argument that it doesn't matter who wrote the plays does not come well from a student who tells us that the sayings of Jesus were not originally those of the Carpenter of Nazareth. Recently Shakespeare's birthday has again been celebrated, and about as much nonsense has been spoken and written about the bard of Stratford as about the babe of Bethlehem.

Now, what reasons do I give for the assertion that Anne Hathaway's husband didn't write "Venus and Adonis," "Macbeth," "As You Like It," and all the rest of the plays and sonnets? The time has long since passed when the "Complete Works" were accepted as being the work of one individual. I think most scholars would agree that the man who wrote "Titus Andronicus" was not the author of "Midsummer Night's Dream," and so on. But while I find it profoundly interesting to speculate on the credentials and the abilities of Shakespeare's literary contemporaries, and the possibilities of different writers being responsible for the plays, that is not my immediate concern. I wish merely to dispel the widely prevalent idea that "genius" can dispense with knowledge and experience, and to eliminate

the man William Shakespeare from the coterie of the writers of that period. I agree with Ringland Robinson, who has done much valuable research into Elizabethan literature, in his first postulate: "The name William Shakespeare was a pseudonym." "Of the life of William Shakespeare little is known," is the first sentence of the most modern (1934) and scholarly "life" by J. W. Mackail. But all the "lives" seem to tell the same story. True, Charles Knight (significantly an author of Fairy Tales), considered at one time to have written the best life of Shakespeare, tells us that there can be no rational doubt that he was educated at Stratford Grammar School. But, says Ringland Robinson (significantly a geologist and a dealer in facts), "There is no record or evidence of his having been at any school." Mr. Knight tells us that Will's father "could not have procured a better education for him anywhere. It is perfectly clear to those who have studied his works that he must have been solidly grounded in the learning properly so called which was taught in the Grammar Schools. . . . What professed scholar has ever engrafted Latin words upon our vernacular English with more facility and correctness? And what scholar has ever shown a better comprehension of the spirit of antiquity than Shakespeare in his Roman plays?"

Now, most writers attribute the greatness of the poetry and the plays to "genius." That extraordinary attitude to extraordinary aptitude leads to extraordinary absurdity. Mr. Ringland Robinson is singularly clear sighted in this respect. I cannot do better than to quote him:—

"Genius has limits; to write comedies requires experience; to write historical drama requires learning; to write tragedies still more experience; genius does not provide learning or experience without which these plays could not have been written. The poems are on classical subjects and full of classical ideas, names and words.

Burns is rightly considered to have been a man of genius, but he never travelled outside his own experience and education, which is well reflected in his works.

The same argument holds good in the cases of Byron and Shelley; both these poets were scholars and travelled gentlemen, and the result is plainly evident in their writings.

Nothing could be further from the truth than this opening sentence from a work on dramatic art, 'The Dramatist is born not made.' One might reasonably speak of a gifted one as a born singer or painter, but a dramatist must have in addition to many other qualifications, experience and still more experience of life, as only many years acquaintance of the world of men and life can give."

I think that is well and clearly stated. There have been many and varied definitions of genius, and the word is much misused. Exceptional ability in a particular direction and with apparently slight effort is considered genius, although the infinite capacity for taking pains is generally there if we are observant enough. But assuredly "genius without learning soars in vain" and is bounded and circumscribed by the possession or lack of special knowledge. Sean O'Casey wrote "Juno and the Paycock," a story of Dublin slum life. Although a genius, he could not have written (at that time) a convincing play concerning "society" people, for the simple reason that he knew nothing about them. It would be ridiculous to argue that one would have to be a sailor to write of the sea, a criminal to write about prison, and so on, in a well-informed manner. We know that the imagination—that capacity to see into the minds and hearts of men and women—is the supreme gift possessed by the writer. But the greatest genius in the world could not write a story about the horrors of the war, movements of armies, meetings between generals, scenes in the camps of many lands unless he had at least glimpsed those happenings or made considerable contacts with those who had. Only of such material is good literature made. Conrad convinces chiefly by his first-hand knowledge.

Galsworthy by his extraordinary sympathy. Both were men of education and learning, wide travel and experience, but neither was in the class of "William Shakespeare" as a writer. Yet we are asked to believe that the greatest literature in our language or, indeed, any language, was the work of an inexperienced "rustic." And when we ask questions that seem unanswerable it is disconcerting to be closed by the argument that "genius" can transcend all difficulties. That simply isn't true. And as I said earlier, the study of the authorship of the Plays and Poems is fascinating to scholars. I cannot pass judgment on things of which I have little knowledge, classical learning and foreign customs, but I know enough to know that behind the "Works of Shakespeare" there is stupendous learning. And I fully agree with Greenwood, with Mark Twain, with Ringland Robinson, that whoever wrote the Plays and Poems, it wasn't this Stratford person, who, so far as anyone knows or can prove, only wrote one poem in his life. It was engraved on his tomb and sorry doggerel it is:—

"Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear to dig," etc.

One might say "Alas, poor Yorick," but the word "genius" cannot explain the fact of a clod writing "Hamlet" or "The Merchant of Venice."

I come back to an early argument of mine that in this question Freethinkers display little rationalism, and lazily accept the traditional conception of "genius." I submit that Stratford-on-Avon is as much a racket as Lourdes, and that all the superlatives about Will Shakespeare and his genius are based on misconceptions now strongly buttressed by vested interest.

J. EFFEL.

## GOD AND THE WAR

WHILST listening to various "tub-thumpers" in Hyde Park the other day I stopped by a stand the occupant of which was vigorously preaching Atheism to an attentive audience. At one point the speaker said: "If I'd been God I'd have stopped the war." A voice: "If you'd been God you wouldn't have been able to stop it!"

I was once told that God was the greatest sadist of all time. If I may take the liberty of quoting myself, "Stopping wars is a matter of precedent, God never stopped one before, so why should he stop this one?" A little reference to the "Bible Handbook" soon shows this is true enough. In point of fact every warmonger since and including William of Normandy has made war in the name of and sometimes at the request of God or the Pope.

I often feel sorry for poor Christian apologists who are trying to explain away God's indifference to suffering. They are placed in an unenviable position by their own utterances. Christ is the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" of whom we hear so much. Yet every possible apologist for the insanity of war says it was being fought for Christianity. I have even been told by one young hopeful that this war was a punishment. What for? The wars before this last one?

We need only refer to the Bible in any form or translation to find some interesting facts about God and war. All through the Old Testament we hear of mass-murder and rapine in the name of the Lord God of Israel. The Old Villain would have revelled in Japanese atrocities in Manchuria, in Italian savagery in Ethiopia, and in German butchery all over Europe. You go to a theatre for enjoyment. God allows wars to continue for the same reason.

FRANCIS I. GOULD.

## ACID DROPS

So another hereditary monarch has received orders to clear out and the Italians are free to appoint their own chief in their own way. Whether they appoint one for life or for a given period, the first condition of democracy is established. There is, indeed, something to be said for a headship that ultimately depends upon the people. There is nothing to be said for a ruler whose only claim is that he belongs to a particular family. We have not yet been able successfully to breed humans as we do animals.

But the ex-King of Italy would have gained less votes than he did had he not had the impudence to intervene and to threaten with eternal damnation all who voted for Communism. Communism is a definite social theory and deserves a hearing if our own talk of democracy is more than mere words used only for an occasion. The freedom that had the Pope's blessing smells strongly of the freedom that Hitler gave his slaves. We did not come across any of our leading English papers condemning the action of the Pope—and our papers also believe in freedom—when no great risks are possible.

Now that the day of celebration of our victory is over and all the churches have duly thanked God for giving us victory—and without even suggesting that he might have acted earlier and so saved lives and prevented the criminality that has emerged in civil life—it is time to express a considered opinion as to God's conduct between 1939 and 19—(we leave someone to fix the date if he can). We have paid a terrible price for victory. Putting aside the loss of life and the multitude of victims alive but with maimed bodies, we have to consider the breakdown of conduct, the fact that never in our history was robbery, and worse, so commonly carried on as it is to-day. With a lower tone in much of life, we must surely place some responsibility on the God who could—*theoretically*—have prevented all the evils that now surround us, but who remained unconcerned throughout it all. It is more than mere folly to thank God for victory. It borders on disloyalty to decency and common sense. If a god exists, then it would warrant brave men and women to curse him and die.

The Rev. Weatherhead, Minister of one of the London Churches that God did not think worth saving from the German blitz, says: "The Churches are cluttered up with unconverted people." That is not true. Some people, of course, go to church for non-religious purposes, but in the main they do believe in their religion. Besides, with the Churches losing members so rapidly beggars cannot be choosers. What Mr. Weatherhead is troubled about is the shrinking of attendances in the churches.

There is no mistake that in some directions the Church is making headway. For example. The other day the Bishop of Chelmsford went to Southend-on-Sea, collected about three thousand people from various Churches, held a public meeting, and asked the three thousand believers to say three times: "With the help of God I pledge myself to help keep England Christian." For right down imbecility that beats all we have seen for a long time. We suggest that these three thousand "swearers" offer free tickets to the "dogs," or free holiday at the seaside, for all who "turn to God" and to all who return to the Church. The Church is in a desperate strait, but they need not have so advertised its intellectual quality.

Some of our leading clergymen are publishing their regret that there were no religious services connected with the parades on "Victory Sunday." That seems to us one sure glimpse of sense, in the celebrations. To thank the men and women who took part in the parade is so far understandable, although it seems a queer way of starting to abolish national wars. But where on earth is the reason for thanking a God who permitted the loss of life during the war, and while here and there military struggles are still going on? That is quite enough of the foolishness of the mass of the people, but to thank God for leaving the world as it is is as near mass foolishness as one can get.

What does the term "God" bring to anyone? If a man's brain is a blank before he uses the term is it ever in any other state after he has said "God"? To say that God has done this or that tells us nothing at all. It is as useless after prayer as it was before. It is a word that mere use may make a man content. So would a glass of whisky. "God" has no logical connection with anything that man knows or ever will know. Of course, the word might bring comfort, but often a doctor gives a patient ease by letting him drink a little coloured water.

We have a vivid recollection of the state of the Christian mind in its relation to Atheism and general Freethought in earlier years. The Church then was shaken very badly by the growth of the development of science, and above all, by the presentation of fundamental Christianity as merely a more elaborate development of savage theories of life. But it was quite common for people to say to an avowed Atheist, "Oh, you must believe in a God of some sort." A very great favourite with the late Winnington Ingram was telling audiences that when he met a man who said he did not believe in God, he asked, "Where did you go last night?" That was about as far as his small intelligence could travel.

To-day the scene has changed. Instead of Atheism being regarded by religious people as nothing more than a passing fancy, it is admitted by Christians as the main enemy the religion has to fight. Here, for example, the following is taken from the "Islington Gazette," which reports the Bishop of Stepney as saying:

"We know full well that here in this country of ours the great majority of the people are quite aloof from religion, at any rate from the Christian religion in any of its forms. A very large number of people indeed have no use for religion, certainly not for the Christian religion. Quite frankly, this is not a Christian country. If we face the facts we know it is not so . . . We Christians are in a minority, and I suppose as regard effective membership, a small minority. That is where we stand to-day."

How have the mighty fallen? But we may cheer the Bishop by saying that while honest and fearless men and women will openly throw Christianity on one side, there are plenty of another type who find it useful to hang on—in public—to what stands for Christianity.

Field-Marshal Montgomery says he owes much to the British soldier. In that case he might stop bothering them about going to Church whether they wish to or not. Their talking to God should be as much respected as the conversation of two women conversing over the garden wall. It is astonishing how easily religion robs a man of his better qualities in his relations to others.

The Chaplain-General has discovered for himself that what Southwark needs is men whose hearts have been touched by God. He appears to have got a little muddled. What the Church needs to-day is a population that has had its heads touched. Touching would mainly influence the blood. But if the people of Southwark went through a course of head-tapping they might come out seeing visions, and quite ready and fit to mount the pulpit. Perhaps we have here the explanation of why the Churches are in such a bad state. God was misdirected and knocked at the wrong door.

The largest Japanese Church service since the war took place the other week, no fewer than 5,000 members of the Japanese Anglican Church took part in it and there was the usual galaxy of Japanese Bishops and priests. In addition chaplains from the British, Australian and American forces were present, and no doubt the lay Japanese was almost as, if not more than, impressed with God's goodness in sending him Christianity, as he was when he got the Atom bomb from the same source. Needless to add, that contributions were asked for to help build the Churches destroyed in the war. The Romans in China and Anglos in Japan—who says the Churches are not recovering their saintly losses in other parts of the world!

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. POTTER.—Thanks for letter; have passed the information on to our reader.

*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

We again wish to thank all those who so kindly keep us posted with newspaper cuttings and items of news that are of interest to our readers. We cannot thank all individually, and hope they will accept this as a grateful recognition. They are part of our unadvertised army, and they are good soldiers.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is considering the advisability of preparing a new edition of the Bible. That means, we presume, bringing the Bible as far away from its original meaning as is possible. We suggest the Assembly might do good work by issuing a bible showing the analogies between the Christian Bible and the beliefs of savages. Frazer has done it on the grand scale, but it would come with enormous power from the Church. Of course, the truth might "bust" the Church, but that is another matter.

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. have arranged a ramble for today and to which all members and friends are invited. Meet at Lickey Terminus at 3-30 p.m. Tea has been arranged at Cofton Tea Rooms at 5 p.m. A ramble offers excellent opportunities for making new acquaintances and we wish the local Branch a successful party of rambblers.

Preston Freethinkers now have an opportunity of forming a local Branch of The National Secular Society. All those willing to help are invited to communicate with Mr. K. Eastaugh, 215, Lytham Road, Preston, Lanes.

Out of the three little children who saw the Virgin and talked with her at Fatima, only one survives—and, naturally, she is a nun and recently paid a visit to the holy place. 600,000 pilgrims visited it at the same time, and of those who could not go, scores sent telegrams to the local post office addressed "To our Lady of Fatima." No doubt these people are quite certain the telegrams will be received—a fairly good estimate of the mentality of true believers. But what can one say of a Church which takes advantage of such hopeless credulity?

## TO ALL WHOM IT CONCERNS

I do not often write about myself, but an occasion has arisen that has made it necessary. There seems to be going on a kind of whispering conspiracy which consists in giving the information that my health is very, very low, and I sadly need a rest, perhaps a permanent one. I have been able to inform those who have written or whom I have met, that I am very well indeed, able to "do my bit," to eat well, sleep well, and enjoy what I have to do. Whether my writing has lost its value, it is not for me to say, but the letters I get from all quarters encourage me to believe that I am not yet worn out.

But letters do not cover those who have not written, and it is to those that I am really writing.

I have, of course, dropped my long journeys for lecturing purposes. Taking three days out of a week, to rush back and get a copy of "The Freethinker" ready for the press, or to do it before going, is a strain on a young man. I really miss seeing many very old friends by declining these journeys, but I can still think of them, and I know they think of me. I am often with them in the spirit if I am not there in the flesh.

My friends may rest in peace. My brain is sound and my will is strong. It has fallen to my lot to steer the National Secular Society through two world wars, and, thanks to loyal friends and helpers we came out with flying colours and stronger than the Society had ever been, and with a brighter outlook than we had ever had. Whether I am losing my grip I must leave others to decide. Personally, I feel quite fit still to strike a few blows for what George Meredith called "The best of causes."

So my friends may rest in peace and leave rumours to strangle themselves.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S ANNUAL REPORT, 1946

By THE PRESIDENT

FOR the first time in six years the Executive of the National Secular Society is able to present its annual report undisturbed by the thump of bombs and the thought of men, women and children dead or maimed.

Nearly 2,000 years ago Pagan Rome could secure peace from Babylon to Scotland. Two thousand years later Christianity provides us with a picture which is not capable of securing peace, but with the aid of science threatens the existence of the civilised human race. Advances have been made, but the guarantee of peace is still far off. It is not, altogether, rhetoric to say that if conditions are not bettered the sooner our planet is destroyed the better. John Ruskin, a great man in his day, said that if women would, on the beginning of war, dress themselves in black and so remain until peace returned there would be few wars. But in this Christian diluted country women, by Act of Parliament, have been compelled to take part in war, and it is worth noting, in passing, that it was only when women showed they could help in the war of 1914 that the political franchise was granted them. As to the clergy it is their business to insist on the worship of their God, who is described in the Bible as "a mighty man of war."

A few preliminary words at this point will not be out of place. The National Secular Society was formed in 1866 by Charles

Bradlaugh. It was a combination of Secular Societies that were scattered over the country, and which in some form or another go back to the beginning of the 19th century. Under Bradlaugh the Annual Report consisted of an account of work done or to be done, and the publication of the report never went further than the "National Reformer." The next President, G. W. Foote, followed the same plan. It was after the appointment of the present President that it was decided to reprint the report for the use of inquirers concerning the Society and its aims. That policy has been followed since, and has justified itself.

Before presenting our own domestic affairs we may report a matter that will be of interest to all. The first International Union of Freethinkers was initiated by Charles Bradlaugh. It spread over the continent, and even as far as the U.S.A. and remained until Hitlerism broke up the movement, killed many of its members and robbed the association of its possessions. But the situation has now been altered, and it is fitting that the revival of the International should have come about mainly by the activity of Bradlaugh's grandson, Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner. The International has now been re-established under the name of "The World Union of Freethinkers." We may be certain that it will be stronger than the first International but it has involved much labour and also expense. Your Executive and the Secular Society Limited contributed £100, and other English Freethought institutions contributed similar sums. The British Section celebrated the occasion by arranging for seven public meetings in one week in London and the meetings were very successful. Our Society is taking an active part with its President and Secretary on the Executive Committee in London.

We may now turn to our own domestic affairs. Our organisations consist of the The National Secular Society, The Secular Society Limited and The Pioneer Press. Although working together they are yet distinct entities, two unregistered and one registered at law. They work together as one entity, and there are good reasons why they should remain as they now function, it will be a bad day's business if this arrangement is discarded. We should always remember that the Blasphemy Laws are still in existence, and the Churches are far from dead. When the last Conference met our offices were in Furnival Street. But we held the place on only a quarterly tenancy, and with the cessation of the war we received notice to quit at a time when it was difficult to get premises of any kind. It was only after scouring the city that we secured better and larger premises than those we had to vacate. These premises are now held on a lease of reasonable length.

One obstacle that we have had to meet all over the country is the shortness of suitable halls. But where halls have been found the results have been generally satisfactory. There is no mistaking the fact that religion was never so low as it is today, and never were there so many people ready to pay attention to Freethought opinions. We are content that the stream is flowing in our direction. Atheism, that was once scorned, and religious leaders delighted in saying that REAL Atheists were very, very rare, are now proclaiming that Atheism is the real enemy they have to meet. Bradlaugh's prophecy that the last fight will be between Roman Catholicism and Atheism may yet appear as a solid fact.

The report of the Executive as to what has been done is published from time to time in "The Freethinker" and all that is required now is a notice of the more interesting and important items. Our first effort is to re-establish those Branches that have lapsed owing to members being transported to some other part of the country. Liverpool is an example of this. There are plenty of Freethinkers there, and Mr. Thompson, himself one of the transported men, is now trying to set that centre to work. A new Branch has been formed at Sheffield and Mr. Corina has been lecturing there. Mr. Thompson's absence from home did not prevent him raising the flag at Bristol, and with success. Halifax, once a strong centre of Freethought, has now a Branch

to its credit and Mr. Corina has also been lecturing there. Manchester, where there is a very large body of Freethinkers, has held a series of lectures in Chorlton Town Hall with profit. Mr. McCall is very active in and around Manchester and he may rest content that he will receive all reasonable help from Headquarters. He comes of a Freethinking family and carries worthily the Freethinking opinions of his parents. Blackburn appears to be having a hard road of travel, but again there should be a larger number of workers than appears at present. A man who keeps his beliefs to himself is not "pulling his weight." More than that he is not a very good citizen. The Newcastle Branch is getting active again, thanks to Mr. Brighton; and the Freethinkers who have rallied to the fold bid fair to restore the fighting capacity of earlier years. Mr. Brighton also recently did some useful work with regard to Sunday Cinemas in Gateshead. His good temper and wit are excellent assets. The new Branches at Belfast and Blackpool are doing what they can. Mr. Clayton continues to take the message of Freethought to outlying villages in Lancashire. It is a very useful but by no means an easy form of our work, but he seems to enjoy it, and it may help him to know we do appreciate his efforts. Mr. Hornibrook has also been delivering lectures in Birmingham, Manchester and other places, and his lectures have met with much appreciation. In London the West London Branch is busy in Hyde Park, and Mr. Ebury is carrying on his outdoor work in all seasons and meets with reasonable success. Mr. Barker maintains his position in Kingston-on-Thames and makes himself heard. He and others may count upon all the help the Society can give, if help is needed. It is worth knowing that the Executive has during the past year been responsible for 280 lectures. These figures do not cover the work done by the Branches on their own initiative. We hope to reach higher figures by the time the Executive presents its next Annual Report.

It is both interesting and cheerful that in many places it is possible to divide the forces of the enemy and so secure some degree of justice. There are two examples of this. The first has to do with the payment of rates. By law a church, or any religious building is free from the payment of rates and taxes. Freethinkers at Tees-Side called attention that the Church was misusing its privilege, and after some hard struggle the Council gave way and put an end to this religious dishonesty. At Sheffield an attempt was made but the Council declined to act because the sum at stake was a small one. That was quite beside the issue and the authorities must have known it. In another case in North Wales, the authorities simply declined to act. Of course it would be possible for any ratepayer to take the matter to the courts, but that might mean a House of Lords trial, and that is very, very expensive. The law is a great thing in this country, so great that often only rich men may use it.

During the past year we have suffered the loss that all of us suffer sooner or later. Foremost among this loss is our late treasurer, Mr. H. R. Clifton. He was one of our oldest members. Persistent in his attention to whatever affected the cause he loved, he did his work regularly, was constant in his presence, and permitted nothing to stand between him and his duties. We have lost a good comrade and a loyal Freethinker. Among other losses we must name are: J. W. Turner, Solomon Yettison, Sarah Gourmand, J. J. Darby, Mary Niven, G. Smith, Lily Wilks, J. A. Langton, Fanny Silvester, Sarah Corina, Josephine Ainsley, J. C. Edwards, Dr. W. L. English, Annie C. Hamjones, Emily Gale, Susan Jane Ebury, H. Elliott, W. Fimmimore. Take it as we will death leaves a gap, the joy of what has been cannot be recalled, but the memories of the dead will be extinguished only with our own lives.

Your Executive has to acknowledge the sum of £8,067 18s. 4d from the Chapman Estate, India. He was a member of the N.S.S. and a very ardent admirer of the "Freethinker." What the net value will be we do not know as it is subject to the cost of maintenance and education of two relatives, and in addition



there may arise other charges. At present the bequest is more of a trust than a gift. The bequest was contested at law, and English lawyers were inclined not to oppose it. Your President took another view and after six years of litigation the end proved his judgment to be sound. We must note that Mr. Driberg raised, in the House of Commons, the question to abolish compulsory attendance at religious services in the Army and Air Force. A very cheering support was given by members, and in the end the motion was withdrawn on a promise that the matter shall be dealt with later. The right to attend religious services or to stay away, is one that should be exercised by members of the Forces as well as by civilians. Our plan of circulating the "Freethinker" and other literature to the Forces evidently has had an effect.

For some time the Executive has had in hand a Handbook that would serve as a guide for both Freethinkers and those who inquire concerning our aims, the law as regards Freethought, etc. That we hope to publish as early as possible. It is the question of paper that is our chief obstacle.

There is one subject that deserves a little more attention. Those who have studied and understand the policy of the Roman Church know that whenever the matter before the voters has a religious bearing the votes of Roman Catholics are controlled by the priests, and they vote to order. Freedom of thought simply does not exist with the Roman Church. We have had that illustrated by the public threat from the Vatican that they who vote in favour of Communism will forfeit salvation when they die. A subject for laughter to others, but something of deadly significance to the Catholic. The attitude was well put by a Catholic writer, Hilaire Belloc; he said: "I accept what she (The Church) teaches and trust her more than I do the evidence of my senses." We see this attitude when the Pope publishes the threat that any Catholics who vote for Communists will be ex-communicated. We may sum up by saying that in this country, at least, the Roman Church wins victories by the solidarity of its people. Others win or lose by the reasonableness of their programme.

In the new Education Act Catholics are given 50 per cent. for the upkeep of their schools. Parliament refused more. But local bodies could increase the grant. And the local authorities of Bradford had arranged to give another 25 per cent. from the public purse. This in a city where over 90 per cent. of the people were non-Catholics. Moreover the Lord Mayor was a lady and a very strong Catholic. The position was interesting. The Protestants were fearful of coming out bluntly and openly against the R.C.s. Then Mr. Corina came upon the scene. He pointed out that the Catholics could not get that promised 25 per cent. if it was openly and strongly opposed. Why should not the Freethinkers and the Protestants join hands and prevent this scandalous raid on the public funds? It was agreed and a strong campaign commenced, in which Mr. Corina played a good part. The bubble was soon pricked, and the Roman Catholic raid on public funds prevented. It was proof that the Roman Catholics win by their solidarity, not by their intelligence. Mr. Corina played a good part in that campaign and he deserves full credit for his work. We hope Freethinkers in other parts of the country will act in the same way. He deserves the thanks also of the citizens of Bradford—except those who are Roman Catholics.

Turning now to a brief survey of our position it is obvious that it is developing to a degree which fills us with satisfaction, and which holds hopeful developments for the future. On all sides the orthodox churches are crying out for ways and means to stem the tide of *Atheism*. We stress that last word for it is well to remember the stages through which Christian leaders have passed. In the first stage *Atheism* was declared to be either non-existing or had little hold on the human mind. Then came the stage in which *Atheism* was due to loose living, or a screen for rascality. Today the number of *Atheists* abroad has

robbed the religious liars of what was once a favourite form of attack. Freethinking literature is everywhere, and is sold to an extent that has never before been witnessed. The dreaded word is being used without fear and with increasing commonness.

But we must beware lest we unconsciously fall into the trap which consists in believing that once truth is established it can take care of itself. It cannot. Truth may be strong—perhaps in the long, long days to come it may be that truth will stand armed and alert and strong enough to hold back lies. But that is certainly not the case today. We should remember at all times the terrible blocking of human advance by the grossest of superstition. We should always remember the fact that great cultures in Egypt, in Rome, in Greece and elsewhere have fallen before the advance of this or that superstition. Many of the good things of life have existed only to be smothered by some deadly superstition. Religion in the name of love has taught men to hate, and to destroy the good in the name of duty. The history of religion is a history of human disaster. No one has put this truth better than that fine scholar and scientist, William Kingdon Clifford. Here are a few of the wise lessons he gave the world of Man:—

"If men were no better than their religions the world would be a hell indeed. . . . If it be true as our daily experience teaches us, that the moral sense gains in strength, in clearness by the power of exercise . . . it must be nothing short of a moral suicide to delegate our conscience to another man; when we love our brother for the sake of our brother, we help all men to grow in the right. . . . When we respect life for the sake of man, tranquillity, order and progress go hand in hand; but when those who only respect human life because God had forbidden murder have left their marks upon Europe in 15 centuries of blood and fire. . . . If there is one lesson which history forces upon us in every page it is this: Keep your children away from the priest, or he will make them the enemies of mankind."

That lesson is one we should always have in mind when we rise up in the morning and when we go to bed at night. Two civilisations went down before the advance of Christianity, and a third but for the contact with Mohammedan culture, and the revival of Roman law and Greek philosophy. In spite of world wars, formed and fought by Christian rule, we have some scraps of civilisation yet. It is this we have to guard and develop until it is expressed wherever humanity exists. Forget the lessons history teaches us, reinstate the creeds of the religions of the world, and we shall find ourselves going rapidly down-hill instead of reaching the mountain tops.

## CONFERENCE NOTES

WANT of space prevents our giving more of the proceedings of the Conference. Mr. Cohen was re-elected and many compliments were paid him. All the officials were also re-elected, the only new one being Mr. Griffiths, who takes his place as treasurer. Mr. Griffiths is a man of ability, a member of long standing, and is well fitted for his job. Resolutions concerning the B.B.C., the danger to freedom of thought offered by the Roman Church, an amendment concerning the ownership of a dead body, which as at present often makes it impossible for the desire of the dead person being carried out, an appreciation of the greater liberty to be gained by India, a matter for which Bradlaugh fought for many years, the possibility of circulating our policy of Secular Education among Trade Unions and similar bodies, broader and less expensive methods of divorce, and a complimentary recognition of the re-creation of the Freethinking International, under the title of "The World Union of Freethinkers," were passed.

A long and rather heated discussion took place on the question of the future of the N.S.S. It was not possible to deal with the

discussion in detail having regard to the evening meeting that was to be held. The President then undertook to see what could be done with a meeting called together at an early date for further discussion.

The evening meeting proved to be a complete success. The speeches were all good, all to the point, and their brevity added to their strength.

The local branch did what it could to make all visitors comfortable, but the celebrating that was going on, the influx of people who came to town merely to "celebrate," prevented the usual amenities being carried out. But for that the branch was not to blame. On the contrary it made what was done the more significant. The Monday excursion, for example, was made impossible because no vehicles were available. So the beauty of the moors had to wait for a more favourable occasion.

#### DELEGATES.

Blackpool: A. C. Rosetti; Belfast: W. Griffiths; Bradford: H. L. Searle, H. Day, R. B. Mitchell; Bolton: P. Foster; Bethnal Green: G. Thompson; Birmingham: C. H. Smith; Blackburn: T. Mosley; Bristol: Mrs. Grant; Cardiff: C. Townsend; Chester: W. Barker; Chester-le-Street: Mrs. E. Elliott; Chorley: J. V. Shortt; Edinburgh: Mrs. McCall; Glasgow: Mrs. J. D. MacDonald; Jarrow and District: P. Turner; Kingston-on-Thames: Mrs. P. M. Barker; Keighley: H. S. Wishart; Manchester: C. McCall, W. Collins; Newcastle: J. T. Brighton; Nelson: W. C. Parry; North Staffs: J. J. Elliott; Oxford: A. S. Carr; Sunderland: W. Rowe; Seaham: H. Irving; Swansea: Mrs. Thompson; Sheffield: A. Samms, J. L. Streater; Tees-Side: D. Fisher; West Ham: Miss H. Allison, I. Greenhouse; West London: F. A. Hornibrook; North London: J. G. Lupton, H. Bailey, L. Ebury, Mrs. Ebury, E. R. Smith; Felling: T. N. Brighton; Halifax: Miss F. Edwards, N. F. Berry.

### A PIOUS PROFESSOR

#### II.

(Concluded from page 224.)

IN his last pronouncement, the Professor has hit upon the truth inadvertently. The whole story of the betrayal is absurd. If Jesus was God, He must have known that Judas would betray Him. Indeed, He depended upon this for the opportunity to rise from the dead. In that case Judas should be regarded as an essential part of God's plan—the cog without which the wheels would not turn—and it is fearful to contemplate what would have happened if Judas had refused to betray his Master. This is presented the nonsensical position which Professor Ritchie realises. It is no use him taking refuge in the typically philosophical stratagem, "that truth is complex and that there is a tension between different aspects which on a superficial view seem incompatible." The plain choice is presented—either Jesus was God or was not God. If He was, then He must have known everything, including all about Judas, and His relations with the Apostles "were based on deception the whole time." If not, then Christianity's central pillar of the incarnation crashes.

The difficulty cannot be gainsaid by the limiting of Jesus' powers, as the Professor hopes. The Christian Scriptures portray the Saviour as a God. He is born in a miraculous manner, performs miraculous feats, rises from the dead, etc., none of which can be reconciled with limitations of knowledge or power. As the Professor remarks a couple of pages later, "rational theology (?) . . . can hardly countenance the notion that God

the Creator changes His mind." No more can it accept that God the Son was "mistaken" about Judas.

Another impossible task is attempted by our author when he deals with the miracles, namely, the natural explanation of supernatural feats. The feeding of the 5,000, for example, is a little too much for even a religiously-inclined philosopher, though he points out that it is not "scientifically impossible," but only "highly improbable." Be that as it may, the Professor's own "interpretation" turns out to be just about the "tallest" one I have heard. Peasants, you see, do not generally go out for an expedition without concealing food on their persons; "but such people are suspicious of strangers, secretive and close-fisted, and they do not care to feed in public." Jesus would have to overcome their "suspicion, secretiveness and greed," and "the lad with the loaves and fishes (which he had probably brought to sell)" supplied some food which Jesus openly distributed, thereby encouraging the rest to bring out their food. "To get a miscellaneous crowd of people, even for half an hour, to . . . really share a common meal with strangers," etc., says the Professor, "is, to my mind, a genuine miracle." And to anyone who disagrees with him he replies: "Try it!"

Worse is to come, for although he agrees that we do not know how Jesus rose from the dead, he claims that we have "good evidence" that the resurrection took place. Such evidence is not forthcoming. The Professor proceeds to take stories from the New Testament and just reiterate them, and apparently considers that Christianity must be true because "a handful of Galilean peasants and fishermen proceeded to change the whole course of human history." "Divine" philosophy should come to earth a little, and then professors in that noble study would recollect that a handful of Germans have much more recently changed "the whole course of human history." Does it mean that they had God's help, as their leader claimed? On the contrary, Professor Ritchie attributes the defeat of Hitler to the will of God.

Yet our author is really very generous. He is prepared to allow that not "all who have called themselves Christian have taught well or set good examples," and that not all non-Christians are eads. But, believe it or not, he holds that his religion has taught the brotherhood of man. He must never have heard of the Spanish Inquisition, must have overlooked the Crusades and religious wars, forgotten the numerous massacres and persecutions. Or perhaps those responsible for such crimes and atrocities only called themselves Christians! It appears that the holy liars are only sham Christians also, for the Professor is quite sure, that historically respect for truth and respect for persons "come to us through the Christian tradition." This, I confess, leaves me limp. No doubt the Church showed respect for truth and respect for persons when it condemned Copernicus, imprisoned Galileo and burnt Bruno. The greatest of the Christian churches, the Church of Rome, claims its authority on the basis of a forgery (Matt. xvi. 18), but nevertheless respects truth. This, however, would be described by Professor Ritchie as a "perversion" of religion.

So he plays the old, old game. The old religious game of head I win, tails you lose. Christianity is responsible for the good, but not for the bad parts of its history and is the only hope for the future. These prominent men in scholarship and allied fields still advocate an antiquated nostrum, until one almost despairs of ever achieving a rational society. For if University men, with all the latest knowledge available at their finger-tips and the leisure hours to imbibe it, fail to relinquish their childhood superstitions, what hopes are there for the ordinary people with more limited opportunities? Reflection along these lines might well lead the Freethinker to a state of pessimistic detachment but rather should it stimulate him to greater effort.

C. McCALL

## MYSELF AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

I THINK it would be a truism that few modern psychologists to-day go all the way with Freud, though still fewer would go so far as to deny that he of all men did more to advance the science of personality and human behaviour than any one before or since his time. And it was Freud himself, who, with commendable modesty and in his old age dismissed the whole of his work as little more than organised common sense. In that, I think lies its strength. For he called attention even if by what may now be designated a form of imagery, to the unseen and often misunderstood power of the Unconscious in its relation to behaviour in ourselves and others, and in doing so laid the foundation at least of a science of limitless possibilities.

It is possible that two entirely trivial personal instances of self-analysis may be of passing interest. Both could have been achieved without even a nodding acquaintance with Freudian doctrine though in all probability they would have remained obscure. And they may serve to illustrate the value of a healthy and honest estimate of one's own actions and outlook in the light of Freud's general thesis.

During the war I became involved in a discussion as to what were Hitler's best chances of achieving an outright win within the next year. This hypothetical problem for some reason reached amongst us the status of a first-class debate, and it was left for members of the group to bring to the resumed "meeting" the result of an imaginary plan. When the time came, some remarkable schemes were presented. Why we were not all arrested as traitors I cannot now imagine, but that is by the way. When it came to my turn I outlined a scheme in great detail involving the capture of Spain and the invasion of England by landings at Weymouth and Folkestone, with an advance on London following a certain line. It was hailed as quite ingenious, and for several weeks quite a number of us began almost to expect the threatened invasion to take that form.

Now I am no tactician, and there may have been many faults and absurdities in the plan I had outlined. But it was only after some days that I realised that in imagining the thing and laying down the plan in detail, apparently with complete objectivity, I had entirely deceived myself. For when I came to look into it I found that quite unconsciously I had not only placed the enemy line to the South of where I was then living, but had given it an odd and completely unaccountable salient "protecting" my distant home, and another town where three others of my near relatives were then living.

So that had I been in supreme command, the plan on which the lives of so many of my countrymen would have been staked would have been spurious, and for that reason would almost certainly have failed.

Further analysis went only to reveal the subtle influence I had failed to detect during the process of arguing the details. For not only were the "vital" localities so placed as to be more or less safe from immediate capture by the enemy, but at any given time communication between them would have remained open and a way of retreat for me to either available as far as the project had been carried.

Again. For many years I have been in the habit of expressing disparagement of a male relative against whom I could on no consideration have any legitimate grievance. When told he had done this or done that, I would either approve grudgingly, for instance, or make some belittling remark. This I now realise had gone on for years until one day my attitude was brought home to me by a frank inquiry as to whether or not I "had any thing against" this perfectly commendable man. I had to admit that I had not. And it has only just dawned on me that some twenty years ago I had entertained feelings of considerable warmth towards the relative whom he had married! And what is most remarkable is the fact that from that moment

onwards my whole attitude towards the subject completely changed and has never since relapsed.

Finally. What lies behind my early though gradual conversion from Christianity to Freethought? I wonder—and am sometimes not altogether without misgivings.

Early in life I cherished an almost inordinate admiration for the venerable person of the Old Quaker Headmaster of my boarding school. His fine old bearded face is an inspiration to me to this day, and I find it almost difficult even now to pass an old Victorian Gentleman in the street without wanting to raise my hat. He is always associated in my mind with a favourite quotation with which he was in the habit of ending his sermons and the memorable speeches on great occasions. Happily, and now perhaps with added and more practical significance, nothing in the association of his beloved memory and Shakespeare's immortal words is lost: "Above all to thine own self be true."

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

## OBITUARY

### WILLIAM BOWEY

We regret to announce the death of William Bowey in his 51st year. He was a sturdy Freethinker and although his independent character prevented him joining any organisation, he was nevertheless a faithful supporter of the North London Branch N.S.S. and later supported the Kingston-on-Thames Branch of the Society from its formation until his death. Our sincere sympathy is with his widow and family in this great loss. The remains were interred in the quiet Esher Cemetery on June 15 where before an assembly of relatives and friends, including representatives from the Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S., a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary N.S.S.

R. H. R.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY; Parliament Hill Fields, 4 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, J. HART and E. PAGE.

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.: "Mankind at the Crossroad."

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., a Lecture.

Brierfield (Lanes.).—Sunday, 2-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Burnley (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. W. BARKER will lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY will lecture.

Oswaldtwistle.—Saturday, June 22, 6-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Worsthorne.—Friday, June 21, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Cafe Room, 7, St. James Street, Halifax).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. HAROLD DAY: "What think ye of Christ?"

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