

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVI.—No. 34

Sunday, August 25, 1946

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### On Losing and Finding God

THERE is a well-known passage in one of Shakespeare's plays that runs, in the accepted version, thus:—

"He that is robbed, not knowing what is stolen, let him not know't and he's not robbed at all."

That is the now accepted version, but after very careful examination I have been driven to the conclusion that what Shakespeare really meant was:—

"Let a man lose his god, not wanting what he has lost, then he will have lost nothing, and should what is lost be brought back to him he will straight away lose it again."

Now I feel that is the real reading of this famous passage because it belongs to an age when many famous men in England and elsewhere were breaking away from the Christian religion, and the Renaissance (Re-birth) was in full swing. What had been said of the old Roman and Greek priests, that two of them could not meet without a sly wink could be said with unquestionable truth of cultured men and women in this country a few centuries ago.

Consider by way of illustration the case of one of the great men of the period—Marlowe. His Atheism was well known, and his plays were famous. In one of them he says:—

A God is not so glorious as a king;

I think the pleasure they enjoy in Heaven

Cannot compare with kingly joy on earth.

Marlowe's Atheism was fairly well known, and indeed a writ was out for his arrest on the charge of blasphemy. Marlowe was not the only Atheist of note. Sir Walter Raleigh and many others came under the heading. The presence of much Atheism in the period may be gauged by the many denunciations of Atheism that came from Christian writers. The religion of Shakespeare is of a very doubtful quality. And as a great many people seem to be seriously upset as to who really did write the Shakespeare plays, it may easily be the case that the revised version I have given of one famous passage is just a blind to hide what the writer was really aiming at. Did he mean the readers of his plays to read the lines as I have suggested? Or did he mean us to believe that "God" counts in a man's life, only so far as he will. Let him set it aside for ever and the matter ends—for ever?

Now it is a plain and provable fact that when man is said to have "lost God" it is not the godless man who complains. He makes no complaint, he offers no reward for anyone who will bring back God. on the contrary, he says he is pleased to find that he has nothing more to do with him. And even if some misguided friend presented him with another god he will probably lose him again. The

adhesive quality of a man's god is often very poor. He has to be carefully watched, and continually praised, or before one knows what has happened another god is counted as lost. It appears that always God must stick to man if he is to survive—as a god. Man might never discover that he had lost god but for the gratuitous busy-bodying of some clerical friend.

I think, then, that on the canon laid down by Shakespeare, when a man does not want a god he loses nothing when the god gets lost or fades out of existence.

The Parsony? Yes, that has some grounds for complaint when a layman loses his god. But then the behaviour of the parson or priest borders on the laughable when it is most intended to be grave and important. An archbishop looks down his nose because the man has lost something. The man says he is better after the loss than he was before. The archbishop says that it really makes the situation worse. As representative of all priests, sub-priests, and would-be priests, they are the only ones who can seriously complain that John Smith has gone and lost his god. For the sale of his goods grows more and more difficult, ultimately he is in the position of one who opens a large store in Regent Street for the sale of fashions that belong to the women of the time of Queen Anne.

Meanwhile, the man who has lost God doesn't even take the trouble to look for him. He does not rush off to the theological lost property office and inquire whether a lost god is there. The parson hunts up the loser, and invites him to the company of lost gods to see if one will suit him. It is the one case in which the loser declines to help any would-be finder. Parsons are the only ones who are seriously disturbed by a man losing his god. Only here and there does it happen that a loser finds his god again, and then he is under the suspicion that he had never lost him. They had only had what we on earth call "a few words." But the man who really outgrows superstition finds himself on a road that has a one-way passage. As I have so often said, you cannot unpull a man's nose; a nose once pulled remains pulled for ever. There are multitudes who can never forget, never completely shake off the superstitions of their earlier life. And the lesson to gain from this is to be careful with the young. See that they have the greatest freedom of speech and learn to place in its proper place the value of correct reasoning.

### The Danger of Seeing One's Self

Many of our readers will remember that about fifteen years ago there was connected with religion a rather heavy storm in a rather large teacup. It arose out of the appearance of a film, I think, under the title of "Green Pastures." The Pastures were in Heaven, the angels were there, as was God, who was a negro, dressed in ordinary clothes and smoking a ten cent cigar. He also entered into a conver-

sation as to how many kegs of liquor were taken into the Ark with Noah and family, etc.

It may be noted in passing that in 1882 the then editor of this journal was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for much the same offence. But times have changed a bit, and that imprisonment was not without exerting an influence on freedom of publication where religion is concerned.

Of course, "Green Pastures" was not exhibited without protests from the religious world. Signed protests came from leaders of different denominations. God was exhibited as a man, and a black man at that. Christian leaders said young people should not be permitted to see the film, the necessity for this was the greater because the young people of fifteen would be getting the first honest picture of Christianity they had ever witnessed. It is certainly as the early Christians saw their creed expressed, and if Jesus ever lived it was, in substance, as he saw it. More than that, it is the way in which the majority of sincere Christians see it to-day. When people pray for God to help them, when they pray for rain for the crops, or victory for a battle, when the sincere Roman Catholics drop cash into a waiting box in church in order for someone to be cured from a disease, or to secure a good price for a house that is for sale, or a good position in this or that line of business, etc., it is on all fours with the black Christian God discussing the quality of "fish-fry." In short, God is either someone with the qualities of a man—much enlarged—or Christianity is just an impostor. The God of the "Green Pastures" is essentially the God of the Christian religion. Minor details are of no consequence. Of course the white Christian does not like to think of God as a black man, and the black man loves to think of God as one of his own colour. But these are minor considerations. God, it must be remembered, can like or dislike, he can be pleased or displeas'd, he can listen to pleas for a variety of things, or turn his head from them. If this is not the case, then all the prayers that have ever been offered to him are, as lawyers would say, null and void.

But what we have said covers a really wide and important area. First of all, the objection to religious plays is that they bring before the eyes of the onlookers a view of things that they may see in an entirely different manner. On the stage the historical tone of the actor is apt to be taken at its proper value. The preacher, instead of being looked upon as the sacred servant of God, is likely to be taken as a rather interesting actor. The music must be "sacred" music, as if any music can be more or less sacred. The language of the Church belongs largely to the past, and its quality is apt to be noted in the theatre. A new point may lead to an understanding of old points, and that again is likely to react to the disadvantage of the clergy. There is a deal of difference between such as "O Lord let us have some rain before the week is out, or our crops will. . .", and "O Lord we beseech thee," etc., etc. It is the difference between humbug and sincerity.

The parson does not outrage nature and common sense by his elocution for the mere sake of making himself a derisive object. He does it because it is the only way he can prolong the existence of his craft. Religion, whatever form it takes, derives directly from the savagery of primitive times. Whether it be ideas or living organisms, they can live only

in a suitable environment. The priest will draw life giving breath where the scientist cannot breathe. To-day the important thing after all is not how to get right with God—the vital question is, "What are we to do with a god when we have found him?"

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE APOCALYPSE—"REVELATION" ON REVOLUTION!

In the canon of the New Testament one book stands out in marked and arresting distinction from the rest. This book is the one which concludes the New Testament, and, accordingly, the entire "Bible," as accepted by all the Christian Churches: "The Revelations of St. John the Divine" (i.e., "Divine" in the sense of "Theologian," not of "God"—Greek—"Theologos"—but more accurately described as "The Apocalypse," from the literary genre to which it belongs.

The Apocalypse, as we shall, henceforth, term it, has several close parallels in the purely Jewish Old Testament. In particular, "Daniel" and "Ezekiel," both of which O.T. books are largely apocalyptic in character. That is, which profess to foretell the future in a series of visions couched in symbolic language. And like these purely Jewish forerunners, the Jewish-Christian writer who was the author of the N.T. Apocalypse, used a complicated oriental symbolism which is not found anywhere else in the predominantly Greek New Testament, and which gives the book a character that marks it off sharply from the rest of the New Testament. As many critics of the Apocalypse seem so baffled by this, to our Western minds, bizarre symbolism, that they quite mistakenly take form for matter and dismiss the book as "John's Nightmare," it will not be amiss if we preface a word on the historical and artistic antecedents to the literary form of the Apocalypse. It goes without saying that commentators have excelled themselves in the fantastic interpretations which they have placed upon this most misunderstood of books. Imagination has run riot. Perhaps the high water-mark in this speculative orgy was reached by St. Jerome who deduced from the text: "There was silence in Heaven for the space of half an hour" (cp. Rev., ch. 8, v. 1), the notable conclusion that there are no women in Heaven! Incidentally, one of the most fantastic commentaries on the Apocalypse came from the pen of—Sir Isaac Newton!

The Jews, like their Mohammedan successors—for, to be sure, Islam is itself a kind of universal Judaism, "Jewish Catholicism," as the present writer has elsewhere termed it—were forbidden by their religion to indulge in painting, sculpture, and all arts which involve representation of the human body, all of which were banned by the Law of Moses, as later by the Koran, as "Idolatry." But as it is one of the peculiarities of ancient Hebrew literature that it is incapable of abstractions, it has to fall back upon symbolism; for which last purpose some kind of pictorial art is essential. The O.T. Hebrews, accordingly, borrowed wholesale from the art of the pagan races with which their history had brought them into closest contact: the Babylonian and Assyrian empires which had enslaved and transported the Hebrews to Mesopotamia between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. It is this, to our artistic judgment, monstrous and grotesque art, which specialised, so to speak, in flying animals and human-animal hybrids, that "John," like Ezekiel and Daniel before him, had recourse to for the esoteric symbolism which the author of the Apocalypse clothed his "Revelations" in.

One can add that he copied his antique Mesopotamian models quite accurately. Those who doubt this and too lightly dismiss the entire book as a "nightmare," are recommended to the British Museum's handbooks on ancient Oriental art! No doubt winged bulls and human-faced lions seem a trifle bizarre to us

But it would be to take a narrow, not to say, Philistine attitude to judge the pictorial art of the ancient East exclusively by the artistic canons, or, rather, prejudices of the English middle-class in the 20th century? Is the art of the Royal Academy, or even of Mr. Epstein, really the last word? (N.B.—The absurdities which result in taking Oriental symbolism as literal fact appear most clearly in connection with the O.T. "Book of Jonah." Life is too short to waste, as so many Freethinkers have been compelled to waste time elaborately demonstrating that the "great fish"—whale?—could not possibly have swallowed Jonah! When all that the author, who wrote for symbolical Orientals, and not for literal-minded "Middle-Western" Anglo-Saxon "fundamentalists," meant to convey by his picturesque little fable, was that Jonah went for three days to Nineveh, the City of the Fish-God Ea-Oannes!)

But let us return to the Apocalypse. There seems little doubt that the book is, next to the Pauline epistles—or, rather, to the original first century sections of these so extensively re-written epistles—the oldest Christian document. The author is a Jewish-Christian of the original pre-Pauline Galilean brand, to whom Messianic Jewish Christianity was, in no sense, a new religion, but a Jewish sect, violently "Zionist" and anti-Roman, and seeking its inspiration solely in Jewish sources. Whether the author believed in an historic Jesus or not is doubtful. As the text stands at present the question must be answered in the affirmative, but there is some reason to suspect later Christian interpolations. At any rate, the author's primary interest was in the "Second Coming" of the Messiah to set up the Messianic Kingdom on the ruins of Rome, rather than in any earthly Jesus. His "Christ," throughout, is the "Christ" of Jewish Messianic tradition, the avenger of mankind upon pagan society and the Roman Empire. "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and not the later moralised Christ of the second century Gospels.

In this fundamental sense, the Apocalypse is a Jewish rather than a Christian book and M. Couchoud is probably correct in considering it to be the most accurate representation extant of the earliest forms of (what was later to become) Christianity (cp. P. L. Couchoud—"The Book of Revelation").

As far as its date and authorship are concerned, we shall hardly go far wrong if we follow Renan in ascribing it to a period shortly before the capture of the Holy City, Jerusalem, and the burning of the Temple by Titus in A.D. 70, say A.D. 68-9 (cp. P. L. Renan—"Antichrist"). To those who, beneath the intricate symbolism, can contact the actual life of a long bygone generation, with all its human passions and hopes and fears, the "Revelation" of John is stamped on every page with the marks of a violent epoch of physical and cultural conflict. Rome, symbol and mistress of the pagan world, "drunk with the blood of the Saints," is locked in the final death grapple with Jerusalem, the holy symbol of the chosen people of God.

In such an unequal struggle, when Palestine, about the size of Wales, was matched with the Roman world-empire, the most formidable war-machine thus far known in history, comprising virtually the entire civilised world, their passionate expectation of celestial assistance remained the last hope of the Jews, and is entirely comprehensible in the historic milieu of A.D. 70. The Messianic Messiah who makes his spectacular descent from heaven (ch. 19), was the only person who seemed capable of succeeding where Hannibal and so many other redoubtable human antagonists had failed in humbling the pride of Rome!

If the date is, then, round about A.D. 70, the author, as we can see from his dedicatory epistle to the "seven churches" (ch. 1) which are in Asia, was named John, and, from the confident tone in which he spoke, was evidently a person of authority in the Jewish-Christian congregations. We see no reason to reject the very ancient Christian tradition, which can be traced back to Justin Martyr, who himself lived in Ephesus in A.D. 135, that the author was the Apostle John, the son of

Zebedee, one of the Apostolic founders of the Messianic Jesus-cult. "Boanerges, the Son of Thunder," whom the Gospels represent as calling down fire from heaven, would be a most appropriate author, as M. Couchoud aptly comments, for this book whose proper mise-en-scene is thunder and lightning!

Indeed, the above supposition as to the authorship tallies with the also very ancient tradition that John, who lived at Ephesus until an advanced age, where a 2nd century tradition records that he died in the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117), had been a Jewish priest "who wore the golden breast-plate." For the Apocalypse shows that interest in and expert knowledge of temple ritual which we might expect from a priest. And in A.D. 70, Palestine would, no doubt, have been an uncomfortable abode for the leader of what Hebrew fanaticism regarded as an heretical and apostate sect!

(N.B.—That great French critical scholar, Joseph Turmel, has recently argued for an entirely revised conception of the Apocalypse. According to him, it is a Jewish, originally anti-Christian book written by a partisan of Bar-Cochba, the Jewish Messiah (131-5) who, and not Jesus, is the "Lamb" referred to. But the argument, though erudite and ingenious, is excessively speculative and hardly justifies us in setting aside all earlier findings in so drastic a manner (cp. J. Turmel—"L'Apocalypse"—1938).)

It only remains to add that the Apocalypse is written in "gutter-Greek," as even Mgr. Knox admits in his recent translation of the New Testament, and was obviously the work of a man who thought in Hebrew or Aramaic before writing in Greek. Unlike the so-called Gospel of "John," which could not possibly be by the same author, the work is a product of Semitic, and not Hellenistic culture in both style and contents.

F. A. RIDLEY

(To be continued)

### ROYAL VISIT

I AM still a child, and I like a circus or a show of any kind. I am easily pleased; clowns and pantaloons, red noses, hot pokers, sawdust, and paper hoops, a comic policeman, and a harlequin who, with the touch of a wand, made wonderful changes—ah me, are such things merely the memories of age and senility?

Still, the circus is always with us. A pompous Italian clown gives an English pantaloon a useless red hat, making the V sign as he is carried about by male performers in petticoats, while other low comedians swing stink-pots, splash water, or beat their tummies. The show is filmed and the whole world sees it. But nobody laughs—except me, but then I can't discriminate and I often think that the highly paid clowns generally put up a jolly poor show. Sixty years ago Queen Victoria visited Edinburgh and the city was en fête. Thousands lined the streets and as my father had an office with a commanding view of the route, our family were lucky. There was much to see—those were the red-coat soldier days, and horses are more picturesque than motors. Many carriages passed. A momentary hush, and then a mighty cheer went up as the Royal carriage passed the window, and the venerable monarch bowed to her subjects. My mother turned to me, her face flushed with excitement.

"Did you see her, Johnny?" she asked in reverent tones.

"Och," I answered with deep disappointment, "was that the Queen? Just an auld woman like Grandma!"

I have never got over that shock, and the mourning for the dead Consort has coloured my outlook on those performances. Popes, Kings, Queens, have fine clothes and jewels, and I think we are entitled to better displays.

But I would be ungallant if I suggested that Princess Elizabeth did not play her part charmingly during her recent visit to Belfast. All the world knows—via the "Eyes and Ears

of the World"—how charmingly she can mend a puncture to the smiling approval of her Royal parents, and the amazement of the A.T.S.

It is the direction which I think is at fault. That is, of course, to please me, but as everybody else seemed satisfied I am, as usual, like the recruit who fancied he was the only one in step. But am I the only person who meditates or reflects on the inwardness or significance of events? What is being done, or what is contemplated when a Royal visit is staged, when something has to be laid, launched or opened in spectacular fashion so that the public are deeply impressed?

The most important thought in the world today is the avoidance of another war; it would have been fitting had the foundation stone been laid of a Temple of Peace. But I'm afraid that would have been a flop. So, to show our desire for peace we launch the world's best-ever in war potential. It is fitting that the clergyman who introduced the Princess in true "Canon Fodder" manner should tell us that, "The 'Eagle' will be the most powerful fighting force in the navies of the world." It must never be forgotten, as Winwood Reade tells us, that God is but another word for king; devotion to a living monarch is called loyalty, worship of a dead one, piety. Realism reveals royalty in human habiliments. Without mysticism, God, and the fulsome adulation of toadies a princess would be merely a young woman. The wearing of ordinary garments certainly militates against reverence of "the people," but the Press comes to the rescue with syruperlatives about royalty.

As the crowds were dispersing I thought about Cunninghame Graham. Who was he, what did he do, and why did I think about him? Well, he was a great writer, and his account of the funeral of Queen Victoria recurred to me because there was some similarity between a scene at that event, and one at this visit.

Graham describes in masterly language the solemnity of the occasion. In her 60 years reign "she was the mother of us all . . ." is a phrase which he constantly repeats after glowing accounts of our phenomenal progress in art, science, invention and the general well-being of civilisation during that period. She was the mother of us all, even the lowliest. . . . The London streets were returning to normal. Many sightseers had brought improvised lunches, and the remnants of one such had been thrown in the gutter. A dog sniffed at it, then passed on. An old man dressed in rags pounced upon the paper, and eagerly devoured the contents which had been despised by the animal!

Well, on the edge of the Belfast crowd a man was distributing copies of a handbill. It said that there were 35,000 people "on the dole" in Northern Ireland, and citizens were invited to a meeting to discuss this emergency. An unkempt individual near me looked at his bill, then crushed it into a ball and threw it away contemptuously.

Time marches on. A dead queen goes, a living princess comes. We talk of Peace, we build for War. What say they? They need work? Give them a circus. Biff goes the bottle. Perfectly timed. Champagne charmingly chucked. On your way, Death Dealer, good killing. Terrific cheering, almost as hilarious as in "Workers Playtime."

It makes you think, or does it?

J. EFFEL.

All the best work is done the way ants do things—by tiny but tireless and regular additions. Remember that nothing can be beautiful which does not contain truth, and that making an imagination beautiful means also to make it partly true.—LAFRANCIO HEARN.

Honour is worth its danger and its cost, and life is worthless without honour.—BERNARD SHAW.

## BURKE, VANSITTART, AND GERMANY

I WAS recently reading a short biography of Edmund Burke, in it were several passages from his speeches on the American War of Independence. I regard Burke as a cheap rhetorician who was blind to change and ignorant of progress, but some of his phrases are a fine reply to the entirely unjust charges which Vansittart and others are making against the whole German race. The proverb runs that there is a fool born every minute. Lord Vansittart's attitude is less that of a fool, and more that of a man who is blinded either by passion or by ignorance, or who refuses to see the facts because they will reveal the futility of his outrageous propaganda. He seeks to indict a whole nation when he can prove nothing beyond the fact that out of a population of more than eighty millions, a few industrialists, a couple of million blind, ignorant, apathetic, and typically European fools, and some political racketeers gave an Austrian artist and house-painter assistance in helping political racketeers in other quarters to wreck the world.

The supporters of an erroneous creed say, in effect, "Let the Germans stew in their own juice. Let them have no trading rights or communications outside Germany itself. Let them starve. Let them die. Let typhoid and cholera rampage all the way from Brandenburg to Bohemia, and we'll sit back and grin. Decency prevents me from applying to these people the epithets they richly deserve. Suffice to demolish their ideas. The next paragraph is an attempt to upset their misguided talk and their impracticable suggestions.

If we are to leave the Germans to stew in their own juice Europe will suffer. Refusal of communications will isolate the Danube. This will create chaos in the Balkans, if such a state of affairs has not existed there for some considerable time already. To leave Germany no trading rights would be to deprive the world of the resources, the tremendous resources, of the Ruhr. Chaos again. If we allow starvation and disease to run riot in Germany, it will be no improvement on the condition of that country under a form of control on which Vansittartism is said to be an improvement. Vansittartism is impracticable. It is crude unlimited Nazism! Lord Vansittart has a lot to learn.

Earlier in this article I mentioned attempts to indict a whole nation. I have much to add to that. What are they to be accused of? Fighting for the Nazis? The defence would be that they had fought for Germany, which is not the same thing. Lack of resistance to the party when it commenced its policy of war-mongering? The answer to that is simple. The British public which put into power the party of which the Noble Lord is a member sat back and grinned whilst that same party shipped metal and material to Germany which came back in the form of bombs and bullets. The same public sat back and grinned whilst that party ran them into war, and hurled them into a hell of which the worst is yet to come. Lord Vansittart has not condemned the British electorate for its action in indirectly supporting Fascism. What right has he and his friends to condemn the German public for following the same policy?

"I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people."

Other attackers of Germany suggest that they be deprived of the Franchise, denied the right to form political parties, and . . . be re-educated in the principles and functions of democratic government! The fact that the third of these cannot exist without the other two is studiously overlooked.

The most brutal of all are those who say that all Germans are bad, are war-mongers, are Nazis, and are sub-humans. They are the real Fascists. I am reminded again of Burke:—

"Am I not to avail myself of whatever good is to be found in the world because of the mixture of evil that is in it? . . . Those who raise suspicions of the good on account of the behaviour of evil men are of the party of the latter. . . . A conscientious man would rather doubt his own judgment than condemn his species. He that accuses all mankind of corruption should remember that

he will convict only one. In truth I should much rather admit those whom I have at any time disrelished the most to be patterns of perfection, than seek a consolation of my own unworthiness in a general communion of depravity with all about me."

I come next to the ill-informed observers who say that Germany will always hate England, and that however we treat them and however we re-educate them they will always cause war to be revenged on England. They say that therefore we must treat these Huns rough whilst we are in control, so that when our troops are withdrawn the Germans will start no more wars for fear of a similar dose of their own medicine. I turn to Pitt the Younger and to Burke for the replies to that:—

"The suggestion that one nation will remain eternally the enemy of another is monstrous."

*The natural effect of fidelity, clemency, kindness, in the governors, is peace, goodwill, order, and esteem in the governed."*

"Nobody shall persuade me where a whole nation is concerned, that acts of lenity are not means of conciliation."

*The question with me is not whether you have a right to make these people miserable, but whether it is in your interest to make them happy."*

"It is not what a lawyer tells me I may do, but what humanity, reason, and justice, tell me I ought to do."

Lord Vansittart and the people who support any of the policies I have mentioned are doing more harm than has been done by any of the people they seek to condemn. They are creating a new Fascism. A Fascism of greater intolerance, greater oppression, and greater uni-partyism. They should be in the dock at Nuremberg alongside of the rest of the Nazi Party.

FRANCIS I. GOULD.

### HUGO'S "LES MISERABLES"

THE following preface appears in an old copy of the novel "Les Misérables": "So long as there shall exist, by virtue of law and custom, decrees of damnation pronounced by society, artificially created hells amid the civilisation of earth; so long as the three great problems of the century—the degradation of man through pauperism, the corruption of woman through hunger, the crippling of children through lack of light—are unsolved; so long as social asphyxia is possible in any part of the world; in other words, and with a still wider significance, so long as ignorance and poverty exist on earth, books of the nature of 'Les Misérables' cannot fail to be of use."

We may be sure that the fertile genius of Victor Hugo was profoundly stirred when he contemplated these iniquities, and the result is seen in the incidents related in the novel. In the matter of subject, characterisation, and style does this novel rank among the greatest ever written? Bearing in mind that the chief interest must be paramount and that no novel can be really educative unless it makes a strong appeal to moral consciousness, the answer is, Yes. As with the novel so with the author. In the realm of literature—we shall say French literature to disarm criticism—Victor Hugo is unsurpassed in accomplishment, abounding mental and emotional activity, and, in the range and capacity of his genius in rhythm and rhyme, unparalleled. 'Tis true that Hugo has been criticised for mistaking preposterousness for grandeur, of being entirely without humour, of creating monsters, and of an inordinate use of antithesis. Even such imperfections remain insignificant blemishes on the majestic canvas of his work. In other words, we gratefully accept the priceless jewels he offers us, and hardly notice a few flaws. A slight defence may be advanced against the charge that Hugo was entirely lacking in humour. Glimpses are discerned now and again in his works. A study of the character of Gavroche in "Les Misérables," shows distinct possibilities in this subtle art. The fact of the matter is that in the treatment of his subject matter, Hugo, in his earnestness and dramatic intensity, deemed humour irrelevant. That is not to say he did not use it.

Another charge against Hugo is his prolixity in the use of factual knowledge and data. Page after page from encyclopaedia and reference books have been inserted into "Les Misérables" on such diverse subjects as the history of convents, slang—and sewers! This circumstance may prove exasperating to a superficial reader, but the author cannot be charged with being dull or uninteresting. The data fits into the story, and the action embraces the data. Furthermore, the interesting and informative way in which the subjects are introduced tends to enhance the understanding of the didactic purpose of the novel.

"Les Misérables" provides us with a fascinating psychological study. Jean Valjean has to decide whether or no to follow the dictates of his conscience and do that which he feels to be perfectly right, and cause others to suffer indirectly owing to his following the strict line of moral rectitude. This is described with the highest degree of literary skill and is known as the Champmathieu Affair. No writer of fiction has surpassed Hugo in his studies of the human mind, its grandeurs, and its depths. The chapter headed "A Tempest in a Skull" has been described as one of the most powerful passages in all literature, and is told with a marvellous imaginative realism of detail.

The first of Hugo's great "social novels," "Les Misérables," appeared in 1863; simultaneously in nine languages. The author was then 61 years of age. The success of the novel was very great because of its social and political implications. Despite certain extravagances it is a curious and wonderfully impressive story, and, as in his other novels, evokes sympathy for the "under-dog." It is a matter for opinion whether Hugo, as a great creative artist, did himself justice in turning his attention to the novel. It is held that the novel has all the marks of an inferior genre, and few of the really great writers who have been attracted by its facility and popularity have been able to find satisfaction within its limits. Hugo had already achieved fame as a poet and a playwright. His work "Les Châtiments," is considered to be the greatest achievement in all literature in the fusion of pure poetry with political and personal satire. The circulation of such a work must have been limited in proportion to that of a great novel. Hugo was only 29 years of age when he wrote "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," and during the intervening period had written many plays and much poetry. He knew his power. He would reach the masses through the medium of the novel. In "Les Misérables" he would tug at the heart-strings of humanity; he would stir the moral consciousness of the people "to see whether their basest metal be not moved." Not many people could be unmoved by reading this novel.

Hugo used the novel as a stalking-horse, from behind which he shot at the social evils of his day. He was not content merely to write about them. He fought and suffered exile for his beliefs and his actions. He, too, in a sense, became one of "the wretched," an outcast, an exile, and was in danger of his life. Although it is true that some of the social evils have been ameliorated, if not eliminated, vestiges of the evils mentioned in the preface quoted are still apparent, and vary considerably in all countries.

It may be asked whether the characters drawn in "Les Misérables" are types or individuals. They are both, and herein lies the greatness of Hugo's imaginative realism. Consider the events and experiences of "Les Misérables" (the wretched) in Europe during the past few years. Are they not paralleled by the experiences of the characters in the novel? Alter a few dates, names and minor details, and Les Misérables written nearly 90 years ago might be a page of modern history and adventure. Viewed in this light we may question whether the charges against Hugo of mistaking preposterousness for grandeur, of creating monsters, of being antithetical, of lacking humour, can be sustained. In tempestuousness of thought, range and power of emotionalism, beauty of expression and dramatic intensity, Hugo has affinity, with a supreme master in the art of music—Beethoven. One does not read the one, or listen to the other, unmoved.

S. GORDON HOGG.

## ACID DROPS

The Bishop of Liverpool organised a Seaside Mission at Southport. He decided that the meeting on the sands would attract a good gathering. Of course it would, no matter what the subject happened to be. So there were crowds and plenty of "heckling," which means there were plenty ready to "go for" the Bishop. The unsatisfactory part of it is that the Bishop answered only a few questions, and those in a very peculiar manner. Thus, to the question: Why, if there is a God, is not life better than it is? And the Bishop seems to consider it a satisfactory answer that: "We say emphatically we still believe in God."

Now that may be quite a satisfactory answer—to the Bishop. He is where he is, and evidently intends to remain where he is; but some of his listeners were not at all satisfied. Nor will it do to complain that some of God's children are very hard to control. That may be, but God appears to have a peculiarly bad method of making people suffer who have not been bad at all. We know the Bishop will say that God will put all things right, but he should interfere to *prevent*, not merely exist to punish. There is also the poisoning of children with filthy ice cream. What is God doing to stop that?

There was another telling question put to the Bishop which he simply evaded. A woman asked why the Church of England excluded women from the priesthood. The Bishop came very near to telling a lie. He said that women did give addresses in the Church. But that was just an evasion. First, it is only in recent years that this small amount of privilege was granted, but she is not allowed to preach in the pulpit. That is kept strictly for men. The Bishop was not honest, and we are willing to swear that when woman comes to preach nonsense, and describe impossible things, she will be as good a hand as any man.

A question was asked about God and the bomb. The Bishop thought that it was a difficult thing to decide whether the Atomic bomb should have been dropped on the Japanese, but he seemed quite certain that it ought not to be dropped on "US." But really there is only one God, according to the Bishop, and he rules the world, and man. And if we have another war we feel quite certain we shall be carrying out God's wishes whatever we do and whoever we shoot at. If we had wished to end war God should have done so long ago. One gets a little tired of a god who commits blunder after blunder and then cannot find a better representative than the Bishop of Liverpool.

Before the war, Poland was one of the strongholds of Roman Catholicism. It is true that it was strongly Nazi, but that mattered not at all to the R.C., for it also has a Nazi basis. But now Poland has a Polish National Church, and it is, in substance, offering all who wish to join the new Church to do so, and that does not suit the Vatican and we may look out for trouble—when the Roman Church finds opportunity for creating it. For the Vatican must rule alone where religion is concerned.

Mr. Richard O'Sullivan, K.C., has a very good reputation in our law courts. But out of the courts he appears capable of making the most astonishing statements concerning this country and its relations to Christianity. Here is what he says, not in a court, but at an "International Conference of Christians and Jews." He is reported as saying:—

"The effect of a Christian system of law and politics is to create a body of free men living in the fellowship of a large community."

That is indeed news, startling news when one recalls the basic foundation of early English law, and the attitude of the Roman Church—to which Mr. O'Sullivan belongs. As a lawyer he should be well acquainted with the real basis of English law, and if he will pay some attention to Professor Coulton's "Five Centuries of Religion," he will find that the Roman Catholic system was anything but a blessing to the English people.

The Rev. P. Chatterton has written a small book on "How to be Happy though Married." Considering that the book is written for religious couples, it looks as though religious marriages are much the same in quality as are non-religious ones. There is, by the way, no such thing in England as a religious marriage. All legal marriages are Secular ones.

The religious service has no greater legal power than jumping over a broomstick would accomplish. In any case happy marriages are not brought about by advice either from platform or pulpit, while booklets that provide pages telling a couple how to live together are as valuable as tossing "heads or tails." Marriages that are decided by studying of characters and consequences are usually about the worst marriages that are made.

By the way, the Roman Catholic "Universe" and the "Church Times"—which is next door to Roman Catholicism—are both strong on the almost denial of the right to neutralise marriage once the religious formula is expressed. To common sense it would seem that when a couple simply cannot live together with a definite feeling of affection the best way is to separate, and the sooner the better. The whole matter here is not a matter of religion, it is a question of decency both for the married couple and for whatever children there are. It is a good thing that it's common sense to make marriage a matter of civic law and not of a fantastic religious doctrine. In this matter it is not the Atheist who thinks little of marriage, it is the rabid Christian who regards marriage as one of the weaknesses of human nature.

Although Eire is one of the jewels of Roman Catholicism, although it contains the Flower of the Faith from its President down to its charwomen, its treatment of juvenile delinquents seems to have disturbed even its sheep-like priests, Mgr. Flanagan condemned recently Eire's Borstal system, which made boys of from 16 to 21 go to jail with such punishments as the cat o' nine tails, the rod, and the fist. But surely he should not complain. These punishments are entirely in traditional Catholic vein—in fact, when Popery was in full power they were far and away more drastic. Cutting off noses and ears, to say nothing of chopping off hands, was a punishment in regular supply in that Catholic Golden Age the late Mr. Chesterton and the present Mr. Belloc were always applauding. Eire's Borstal is, in fact, heaven itself compared with what were punishments then.

One of the regular writers in the Roman Catholic "Universe" pretends he is greatly astonished that a handful of scientists should believe they have banished Hell. This gentleman says that "the credulity of the incredulous is so childlike, so fragrant, that only a brute would wish to destroy their innocent dream." Now those who write and speak for the Roman Church are not fools, generally the real fools are kept in the background. That, of course, gives greater value to the "fragrant loveliness" that the men of science are trying to destroy. We commend a reading of the Catholic pamphlet "Hell Open to Christians," which holds a number of pictures of young people being tortured with fire for ever—for the terrible sin of not saying prayers, not going to Church, etc., etc. That booklet used to be on sale in London, but we believe it has been withdrawn, but it is for sale elsewhere.

Lest it should be thought that this is an old story and the teaching is now discarded, we commend a booklet on "Hell" by the Rev. Rickaby. Both writer and pamphlet are still alive and can be bought from the "Catholic Truth Society," 33, Eccleston Square, London, price 3d. According to the Rev. Rickaby, the fire is "real fire," and there are pictures illustrating the eternal torture of children for not having gone to Church, etc., etc. We can give but one partly-detailed tale of Hell. Here it is: A child is condemned to Hell. "It sees thousands and millions of devils . . . On they come more swiftly than the wind. . . Now the foremost ranks of the devils are near at hand, close to the child. They are hissing at it, spitting fire and venom on it. They stretch out their great claws of red-hot fire to get hold of the child. There are many pages of this kind of thing, and we really think something should be done to those damnable scientists who are trying to stop the children enjoying the future the Roman Church holds out to them.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

**BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.**—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 from Mrs. E. Hughes to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

*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 are convinced that when history of Christianity comes to be written impartially and scientifically its influence on the mental life of man will be counted as its greatest crime. It commenced its career by damning all people who disagreed with its doctrines. And as soon as it secured Secular power it added to that celestial damnation for ever and ever. It burned, it tortured, it lied. It made heaven secure for the fool and reserved hell for the thinker. It did not merely kill, it crammed the mind of man by imposing on all a creed and a practice that made men afraid to think lest it should lead to eternal damnation. When Hitlerism set to work by paralysing the mentality of the German people it was doing only what the Church had been doing for many centuries. It is with us still. When the Churches claim control of the education of the child it is playing the old game. For the child grows to manhood and womanhood and hands on to its successors the evils it has been taught. Kingdon Clifford was right when he said that if you would have your children good and honest citizens keep them away from the priest.

We know F. A. Hornibrook in various capacities, but we have just found him in another. He appears as a lover of the boxing ring—not as an operator but as a lover of the sport. He appears to know all about famous boxers in England, France, and elsewhere, and he presents his experience in a booklet bearing the title of "The Lure of the Ring." He skips over the principal boxers in England, France, Australia, etc. We have never seen a boxing match and now we begin to think we have lost something. But for ninnepence anyone can get a bird's eye view of the "ring" and its masters. It is interesting.

Here is a quotation from the pen of G. W. Foote, one of the greatest writers that ever held a pen in defence of Freethought, written many years ago:—

"It is not an extravagation that in England alone, twenty million pounds a year are spent on religion. The figures fall glibly from the tongue, but just try to realise them. Think of a thousand, then of twenty times that. Take a single million and think what its expenditure might do in the shaping of public opinion. Well then, just imagine not one million but twenty millions spent every year in maintaining and propagating a certain religion. Is it not enough, and more than enough, to perpetuate a system which is firmly founded to begin with, on the education of little children.

"Here lies the strength of Christianity. It is not true, it is not useful. Its teachings and pretensions are both seen through by tens of thousands, but it has wealth to support it. 'Without money and without price' is the fraudulent language of the pious prospectus. It would never last on these terms. Withdraw the money and the Black Army would disband, leaving the people free to work out their own Secular salvation without the fear and trembling of a foolish faith."

We do not wonder that Christians of his day thought that prison was best place for him. If we had had the misfortune to have been a Christian at that time we might well have come to the same conclusion.

Owing to the paper shortage we were unable to meet all the demands for the bound volume of "The Freethinker" for 1945. Three copies have been discovered in our stock room and those who were disappointed in procuring a copy earlier this year should write at once for one. The price is 17s. 6d.

We are greatly indebted to those of our readers who send us cuttings from local papers containing items of news they think will be of use, but some of them—quite useful ones—are without the name and date of the paper from which the items are taken. Will they be good enough to see these are not omitted.

## MORE RELIGION

IT must have been a shocked House of Commons the other day when Mr. Tom Driberg, who somehow combines a fervent belief in Anglo-Catholicism with his Socialism, wanted to know why Dr. Frank Buchman and his Oxford lambs—or should I say sheep—were allowed to land here freely and openly to propagate a kind of religion which to a true-born Christian was to say the least, highly distasteful? That the Tories must have been shocked goes without saying—though perhaps they expected this kind of thing from the other side; but it appears that some of the Labour members were so horrified that they sat down and wrote a remarkable disclaimer to that active champion of Christian rights—the "Daily Mail," and, of course, the "Daily Mail" published it.

"As members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, we desire to dissociate ourselves," they wrote, "from the attack made by Mr. Tom Driberg upon Frank Buchman and those working with him towards Moral Re-armament. . . . We believe that civilisation will be submerged in a welter of selfish materialism unless the spirit of M.R.A. . . . is understood and practised in all walks of life . . ." and there followed 48 gallant signatures—not one of which, I sadly confess, I remember ever seeing before.

Our strongly Socialist contemporary, "John Bull," though it probably knew quite well how awfully wrong it was to limit the activities of any Christian gentleman going about doing good, seems to have been quite undeterred by religious inhibitions, and recently gave its readers two pages of a report on Dr. Buchman and his Apostles which, while skimming as closely as it dared to the danger line, must have left most of the people who read it, if they were Christians, all hot and bothered.

"Is it Brotherhood or Big Business?" asks "John Bull" and then proceeds in such a way as to leave no doubt whatever in the minds of its intelligent readers.

How many years that Buchman Brotherhood has been working I cannot recollect, but we are told that its bank balance on September 30, 1945, stood at £120,261 10s. 2d.—"and among recent gifts was one of £11,000." This certainly does not look as if the Doctor or his Apostles had nowhere to lay their heads, and I am quite prepared to believe that with such a sum behind any organisation there would be plenty of "Brotherhood" as well.

When the old—perhaps the present—Salvation Army made a convert, the change was generally credited to being washed in the Blood of the Lamb, though I must acknowledge that many of the converts I saw had a good deal of the original dirt left on

them when they passionately declared their faith in Christ. What the Buchmanite attributes the "change" to unless its to their own special pleading, I do not clearly understand, but change you must if you want to join the Holy Group. You have to be Absolutely Honest, Absolutely Pure, Absolutely Unselfish, and proclaim Absolute Love. And the greatest of these is (I apprehend) Purity.

I am not surprised. "Purity" with the Buchmanites means something they connect with sex, a passion for which seems to have always bothered Christians and to which they at one time attributed almost all, if not quite all, the Sin in the world and which ultimately could only be washed away in the Blood of Jesus when he died on the Cross. It is really extraordinary how soon we reach the sexual question when we get another brand of Christianity.

You must openly confess your "Impurity"—though I am ready to admit that if you cannot do this in a mixed company you can do what a convert recorded by "John Bull" did, throw your pipe on the fire, and loudly exclaim, "That's my gift to Jesus!" What joy there must be in Heaven when such a tremendous sacrifice is earnestly and sincerely made!

As in all similar movements a great splash is always made by the imposing list of converts drawn from high places. If Dr. Buchman cannot show a Sir Oliver Lodge or a Sir A. Conan Doyle as can the Spiritualists, the picture of Dr. Buchman presenting his book on Moral Re-Armament to Mae West ought to turn the scale in his favour—though I do feel, looking at it, that I can almost hear the dazzling and fascinating blonde saying *sotto voce* in her most charming Middle West accent—or is it from the Bowery?—"The Sucker!"

If Dr. Buchman feels that he has a Mission in this world, so I am sure must many another Christian Saint, and among them is a Chicago Doctor of Divinity called Torrey Johnson. The name Torrey recalls to me that other American Evangelist Dr. Torrey who early this century thought also to come to England to collect converts and cash, and who, branded as an exceptionally ugly liar, was almost hounded out of the country by that great journalist—also a Christian—the late W. T. Stead. I expect Mr. Torrey Johnson, however, knows nothing of all this as he is only thirty-six years old, and his mission is, says the "Leader Magazine," "to bring the whole Protestant world back to good old-fashioned religion this year." This seems to be a much more hefty job than anything Dr. Buchman has so far attempted.

Mr. Johnson limits his task to the Protestant world, but he admits even then it's Herculean.

For instance, in Great Britain, which he recently visited, he says he found only one person, in the age groups under thirty, out of 100 go to church. This is rather optimistic, anyway, but with such a nucleus he hopes in a four months' intensive campaign with his organisation, the "Youth For Christ International," to bring most of the population here to Christ's feet almost in a jiffy. He believes in terrific publicity and terrific noise. He has big drums in plenty, and pretty girls playing saxophones, flutes and even louder musical instruments, and singing in a great heavenly chorus.

Behind the Doctor, when he is winning souls, is a huge head of Jesus looking as little as possible as a Palestinian Jew though with the traditional flowing locks and beard. And between them he has hooked in 1,500,000 American boys and girls whose deprivation of a few miserable hamburgers and ice-cream sodas every week, keeps the Doctor's home going very comfortably indeed. I do not expect his success in this dog darn'd old country will be quite so flamboyant or so certain as he does.

So far, the negro God Almighty, Father Divine, has not intimated his desire to bring us here back to him in all humbleness, but I see that he has hit the limelight and made news and big headlines in spite of the fact that even in America his claims to genuine Divinity can never exactly rival those of Jesus. He has married a white girl disciple, his "sweet Angel," and I am by no means sure that this holy sacramental act is altogether

approved in American white circles. From the photographs published of the happy pair I am inclined to agree with them, but there really should be no surprise at the event. These men of God always appear to have female followers, and if there are any others about we should never expect them to marry the "fat and forty" ones, the "coal black mammies." If Father Divine had done so there would have been no story.

Boiled down in all essentials I expect there is very little difference between Dr. Buchman's, Dr. Johnson's and Father Divine's religion. How in the name of all that is wonderful, in this year of grace, 1946, the primitive fears and hopes of early man, nowadays called the Christian religion, can still find followers is something which, in forty years of Freethought, baffles me. Myths and miracles, gods, goblins and ghosts, angels, devils and demons—when will the good Lord deliver us from such a holy collection?

H. CUTNER.

## THE GOD OF BERNARD SHAW

ALL Atheists, Secularists and Freethinkers may breathe again! Mr. G. Bernard Shaw's heart, according to his own admission in his recent letter to the "Freethinker," is *not* "the heart of a despairing pessimist sinking into a heap of sand." Oh dear no. He was referring to *other people's* hearts. But why "sand"? There are many less savoury substances one could sink into—sand is so clean and smooth and soft; the Mohammedans even wash in it when there is no water available. Surely any honest-to-goodness despairing heart would select a nice oozy quagmire in which to gasp and gurgle and finally expire! But then again—*would* it finally expire? If Mr. Shaw's Life Force is really "the goods" we must presume that it would not. His allusion to the biological fact that there is no discovered chemical difference between a live body and a dead one (provided it has not been dead too long!) seems to infer that the Life Force is something entirely extraneous to the physical body—some sort of electrical current which charges the human machine in order to animate it for some obscure reason of its own, and which also decides to switch itself off when it considers the body has served its useful purpose! *How* and *why* it does all this we are not told. Mr. Shaw is quite content to call it a miracle and a mystery and to leave it at that. But then the Christians are also content to call the workings of *their* God miracles and mysteries, so we do not seem to have advanced very far—merely exchanging one Unknown for another Unknown.

It sometimes happens that during a surgical operation the patient's heart ceases to function—in other words the patient dies. But by skilful manipulation and massage of the heart muscles the surgeon has succeeded in re-starting the mechanism and so the patient comes back to life again. Now if the Life Force is something entirely extraneous how in the name of all that's wonderful can it return to the body it has already left? *Where* has it been in the meantime and *why* does it decide to return at all? Also we are not too convinced about its influence on the Mind—as per Mr. Shaw's illustration of the man who might have been a prosperous village churchwarden but instead decides to become the persecuted Freethinker.

Why is it necessary to admit the existence of a Life Force in order to explain one's *change of mind*? And does this mean that Woman, who is *always* changing her mind, possesses more Life Force than mere Man? Surely the Buddhist theory of Re-incarnation offers the most logical explanation of our varying mental attitudes, our different likes and dislikes and peculiar preferences, our attachments to certain kinds of animals, our fears of fire or water, the call of the sea, desert or jungle—even the Squire and the Penguin complex! All these may well be the results of experience in a former earthly life. It would also explain why Bernard Shaw is a genius and I am not!

Buddhism, which is more a system of mind culture than a religion, seems to be the only *reasonable* philosophy because it



does not entail any blind belief in a supernatural deity or other mythical relic of the primitive past but it does encourage good living and the development of a good character by its teaching of the advancement and final perfection of the "Self" through successive stages of existence.

Furthermore, Buddhism does solve the riddle of all the apparent inequalities and injustices of life by admitting the Law of Compensation and by the hypothesis:—

"Our actions still pursue us from afar,  
And what we have been makes us what we are."

I am fully aware that the majority of our fellow Freethinkers are quite happy to accept this life as the only life, to be followed by utter and complete obliteration; but being of an enquiring nature myself, such Sweet Oblivion does not appeal to me. I want to go on finding out more and more of the great secrets and mysteries of which we are a part. There are so many things we do not and cannot understand in this life—why must they be left for ever unanswered?

If Mr. Shaw's Life Force can guarantee us something better than final extinction then I am all for it—but I do hope it won't suddenly decide to change me into *prosperous churchwarden!*

W. H. WOOD.

### ONE THING I KNOW

I CAME across an illustrated advertisement the other day in an American magazine. It was, I felt, in particularly bad taste, though effective and no doubt successful in its object. It was one of those vividly realistic photographic efforts at which the Americans excel. In the forefront a typical well-dressed affluent-looking business man sat at a large desk, bare but for an ornamental telephone instrument. He lay back in his chair gazing patronisingly through the window out on to a bare landscape flanked by factory buildings and the paraphernalia of some unidentified industry. Passing the window was a fine figure of a man, walking erect to work with a pick over his shoulder. "There!" the big business man mused, "but for (somebody's correspondence schools), go I."

Somehow I felt, and hoped, that an advertisement quite like that would not have been found in an English journal. And there would, I think, be some readers who, contrary to the intention of the advertiser, tended to identify themselves with the splendid figure passing the plate-glass window, rather than with the self-conscious Napoleon of Finance who was intended to "steal the show."

For the Christian virtue of humility there is much to be said. Not, albeit the demeaning and servile humility enjoined in the Catechisms, nor even the psychopathic neurosis "enjoyed" by victims of religious revivalism, where whole congregations are wont to be reduced to tears by thunderous and dramatic injunctions to "break down—men of Leeds, before Almighty God." (An effective trick of Spurgeon's when he felt the atmosphere of his lunch-time meetings becoming too prosaic.)

For those of us who, with Einstein, learn from each passing day more and more of our utter dependence from dawn to dusk, yes, and even through the long hours of the night, on the service, skill, and faithful devotion of countless other people, there need be no exhortation to "Walk Humbly with Thy God."

It is a sobering thought, and one which assails me ever more and more with the passing of the years, that from the moment I leave my door, either on foot or by car, I am instantly surrounded by a vastly complex civilised furniture, not one single item of which could I myself produce, maintain, nor even in the first instance conceive.

Consider a journey from a provincial town to London, by car to the station and thence by train. Passing the observation that there is little in my house falling even remotely within my

own capacity to construct or provide, I step into a car consisting of some eight thousand components designed, stressed, and assembled by unhonoured wizards whose calculations and drawings would mean as much to me as a Chinese income tax demand. Moving over a smooth-surfaced and durable road skilfully laid and maintained by men who are as much artists with the pick and shovel as anyone who plays a first violin, I drive down streets of houses each perfectly vertical, and built with an accuracy and stability which defies the highest test, reminding myself that I am incapable of laying three bricks together in a straight line. To anyone inclined to undue satisfaction in his own skill and importance, let him stand for a few minutes to watch the bricklayer, perched on his scaffold, itself cunningly erected and supported, while he slowly and deftly feeds the growing wall or rising buttress, and ask himself honestly, how is it done.

My train is in to the minute. It has come from Plymouth, averaging 60 miles an hour over a thin metal track which for the whole distance cannot have varied more than an inch from its true gauge, to which it has been held by some hundred wheels each carrying a steel flange not more than an inch in depth. It is timed in at 8-15 a.m., this time having been arrived at by calculations dependent on a network of times and distances so complex as to stagger the imagination of an ordinary man. Who are the men who do this? Who honours them?

In 47 minutes I am in Paddington, having travelled an almost level "road" where a hundred years ago it would have been necessary to wind and turn, climb and descend over hills and valleys for three or four hours. All the way the line is clear on a single route traversed daily by hundreds of similar trains which never collide. Over the whole distance we are watched over by an army of nameless, devoted officials in signal boxes and station controls, working with never an absence and rarely a failure to some unimaginably complicated rota of duties ensuring their attendance day and night. Somehow, from its confined position at Paddington against the buffers, the engine which hauled us will be turned and ready at its appointed time to leave again for Plymouth over against the refreshment room at platform 1. How it gets there, nor why it is never late, one can only ask, and no one ever thinks of doing so.

My friends tease me for my lifelong veneration for Doctors. I am fully aware that even in the medical profession there are some deserving of little honour, but I believe them to be few. The qualities of a good physician are as exacting as any man can be called upon to maintain. The skill and learning of most is something worthy of the deepest respect, and as far as I am concerned it is theirs. How could one not unconsciously honour the man or woman on whom one would, and probably will, call on in the direst extremity of life. Somewhere, I hope, still a young practitioner, there lives and works, the man who will stand by me at the hour of my death. Until then I shall continue to honour him. How could one deny an instinctive feeling of respect for the men and women who know us so much better than we know ourselves?

Of course, I know the answer to all this. The man who built the "Queen Mary," if one were to meet him, would appear a very ordinary person. He was only co-ordinating and implementing the accumulated skill and experience of generations of the past. The Accountant who juggles with figures so complex that to me they are little more than meaningless symbols, has learned the job slowly, building on the experience of traditional learning, and now finds it easy. The Doctor grows callous and is at heart a mercenary and worldly man. The bricklayer's work is really quite easy when you know it, and the musician, the craftsman, and the poet are merely using talents for which they were not themselves responsible, and so on and so forth.

But all that is beside the point. Each in his sphere, viewed from a standpoint of my own fully recognised ineptitude, I like to think of as a great man. I may not love him, that would be asking too much, as Christ did, for as Bernard Shaw said, "The

vast majority of mankind behind a thin veneer, are unlovable savages at heart." That may be why I often prefer not to meet in person, those who by their works I most admire.

On the other side, let it not be assumed for a moment that there is not a right and a healthy degree of pride, amounting rather to proper self-respect which should temper the attitude of each. For, above all, in a world of free thought and free institutions, each man, though members one of the other, stands in a sense alone. Thus in our respect for the value and dignity of all around us, we pay by implication, due homage to ourselves.

"One thing I know," said Plato, "and that is that I know nothing."

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

A SHORT time ago I pointed out how all brands of Christianity were lining up behind the Pope for a united effort against Atheism. Now, a few more bits and pieces on the same subject.

There exists some considerable difference in outlook between Roman Catholicism and Methodism, but at the recent Methodist Conference at Central Hall, Westminster, some remarkable statements were made.

The Conference discussed Religious liberty as part of the Peace treaties. Of course, we are familiar with appeals for religious liberty, but these have generally boiled down to demands for privilege on behalf of one or another of the many Christian sects.

But listen to Dr. Scott Lidgett, ex-Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council.

"It is for the Churches of Great Britain to press for a real measure of acceptance of Religious freedom throughout the world." (My italics.)

The doyen of Methodism can rarely have uttered a better one than this at any time during his long life. Taken literally, he makes the suggestion that the combined churches of this country ensure that Moslems, Buddhists, Jews, etc., enjoy equal measure of liberty with Christians in matters of religious expression, and those without religion to share equally the freedom.

However, taking into consideration the fact that the conference bewailed the loss to Methodism of some 83,000 souls in the past ten years, and as is well-known, other sects have suffered similar losses, the venerable doctor cannot really have meant what he said. Another speaker, the Rev. W. J. Noble, informed the assembly that the Committee of Religious Liberty of the British Council of Churches "is in close touch with various authorities responsible for the preparation of peace treaties." In all probability the "various authorities" mentioned are psalm-smiling members of the Governments of Britain and U.S.A. It is only quite recently that the latter country was "awarded" its first saint by the grace of His Holiness. Then, recently, comes the news that Pastor Niemöller, ex-U-boat Commander, and Hitler's famous prisoner, is being sent by the German Protestant Church to "God's own country." His mission is to appeal for economic and financial aid to reconstruct Germany "as an alternative to growing Russian influence." Thus, it is evident, that this violently anti-Communist parson is not going to U.S.A. merely to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But, back to religious liberty.

In a nutshell, the Bible Fascists mean privilege for religion so long as it is the Christian religion. That means, in the long run, the Roman Catholic Religion!

In Spain, for instance, Romanism dominates everything. None other may function.

Whilst it is true that other Christian sects still exist, their priests have no status, and ceremonies such as marriage, etc., are null and void by law. Yet a great many of these supported the "gallant Christian gentleman" in his fight for the whip hand he now holds.

The leaders of non-Catholic Christianity must be as blind as their followers. The flood tide of Atheism has gained such momentum that in their efforts to stem it they are prepared to sell themselves and their dupes to the hated Ritualists. A Catholic may not attend a ceremony of any other religious body without special permission of his priesthood, neither may he accept any but the Douai Bible. All other Christian sects are Pagan to a Roman Catholic.

Non-Catholic leaders know this well, but they fear Atheism to-day more than being swallowed by Rome. The Roman Catholic Charlatans will, in my humble opinion, make full use of this frenzy.

Political priests are in the ascendant. In countries abroad just now, wherever there is reactionary activity, you will find at least one political priest. Many of these have already died traitors' deaths in several countries.

Non-Catholic bodies are about to provide some clerical reactionaries too. "Revivalists," as recently described in these columns by Mr. J. Effel, are becoming more and more numerous. They are mainly reactionaries, with, be it noted, American training.

Our so-called Socialist Government refuses to investigate the B.B.C. activities until after the implementation of its renewed charter. The foreign broadcast departments are choc-a-bloc with Roman Catholics despite the "simple Protestantism" mouthed through microphones at home.

Religious liberty! It exists in but one country on earth. In Russia, religion and Atheism have enjoyed equal measure of freedom of expression for a generation. Certainly religious subjects are forbidden to the young, but Atheism coming under that heading is forbidden also. Throughout the U.S.S.R. neither is given privilege. How has religion fared on this?

The world is fast learning. In referring to the U.S.S.R. I simply used the word "religion." For Russia has been a land of many gods, several still reign there, but their thrones are tottering. "Let the other gods die," saith the Pope. "Ours must live." Atheism will kill the other gods, but it will also kill the Pope's. Russia believes in gods fighting their own battles, and on level ground.

That "Russian influence" of Pastor Niemöller, when preached in America, will bring the Protestant creeds nearer to the dripping jaws of Rome.

And a ninety-two-year-old Methodist cries for Religious Liberty!

G. L. C.

## WAR AND MORALITY

Many of our papers have expressed their deep regret at the promiscuous behaviour of "our" men in Germany and also at home. We agree with what is said, in principle, but it is a great pity that our great, honourable truth-at-all-price press does not point out what is going on now, both abroad and at home, the wholesale and widespread robbery such as breaking into houses, etc. and business robbery in the prices charged for goods and commodities, etc., etc. All these things are the normal outcome of international wars, and for that matter, of internal wars, but, of course, to a smaller degree. The finer aspects of humanity are dulled in war and by war, and it is just foolishness to expect that after six years of actual war the people will be as they were in peace time. The moral price of war must be paid by both the loser and the winner.

Ruskin said that if directly war began women dressed in black and remained so dressed as long as war lasted we should be doing something to make war detestable. But we plan in an opposite direction. The war dresses of women are made as attractive as possible—the heroism of men and women—in the war field—is praised, food is secured, and the world is divided into two parts—those who are taking a direct part in war and those who are not. Mainly we glorify the warrior and are content with a passing word of praise to those who work for a mere war effort. If we could drive home to all people the demoralising effects of war, and if that could be international we might be doing something to prevent war. But we seem a long way from that point.

CORRESPONDENCE

GENIUS AND SHAKESPEARE.

Sir,—A correspondent in the "Freethinker" of 14th July mentions the names of certain composers and authors who were abnormally gifted. But these accomplishments were in accordance with their circumstances of life, upbringing and environment. Shakespeare's (if "Shakespeare" were indeed "the Stratford rustic") parents were illiterate; the overcrowded family cottage was bookless, as was Stratford in those days.

Nobody denies that whoever wrote the plays, he was a genius, but this fact does not help us in reconciling the life-story of the man of Stratford with the "Shakespeare" of the works. Supposing that he had attended the little school, we should naturally have expected that the unusual gifts for learning, the power of observation, and the astonishing memory of a youth destined to be the miracle of the age and eternity, would have caused such a sensation in the village of some 1,800 inhabitants, that the master, pupils, the vicar, and other townsmen would have recorded the phenomenon either in writing or gossip. The complete silence is more than significant.

Attendance at that school would not have qualified him for the writing of *Venus and Adonis* ("the first heir of my invention") which is probably the most highly polished and scholarly poem in our language. The instruction at the school was extremely elementary. I have dealt with that on page 26 of my *Shakespeare: New Views for Old*.

Genius alone could not have written Shakespeare. The genius with which we are concerned was in conjunction with wide reading, and the highest culture the age could afford. No man ever became learned out of his own consciousness. Knowledge comes neither by inspiration nor accident. Genius is a gift of nature, but Nature alone never yet gave knowledge and culture.—Yours, R. L. EAGLE.

"INFIDEL THEORIES"

Sir.—The United States prosecutor at the Nuremberg trial, in his charge against Rosenberg, accused him of putting his "infidel theories" into practice. Whether the term "infidel" is intended here to carry its derogatory and slanderous implications, or is used in its simple meaning as one who disbelieves in the faith of a person using the term, it must be equally offensive to some of our Allies—as well as being entirely irrelevant. Further to infer that Rosenberg's theories are distinctive of all those who do not accept or have rejected the Christian faith is not merely untrue but seemingly tendentious. No one, however, will contend that "infidels" as individuals are any better or more humane than Christians, but it is certain that the hosts of unorthodox and infidel reformers from Paine to Charles Bradlaugh had little in common with the political theories of the vile Rosenberg. In fact, the close student of history can show that these closely resemble in character the theories the Christian Church in the past applied to its own enemies. At all events Rosenberg's Christian colleagues, including the Catholics Von Papen, Seyss Inquart and Streicher—do not appear to have made any protest.

So obvious are these facts that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Judge Jackson is deliberately deceiving himself. And as I fear it is in vain that we find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure, advantage, or profit in being deceived.—Yours, etc., JOHN M'MANUS.

FRANCO AND FREETHOUGHT.

Sir.—Your correspondent, Mr. W. E. Nicholson, writing under the above heading in your issue of August 4, 1946, introduces a novel argument in regard to dictatorships, and makes the bold statement that: "It does not follow because the Christian is God-intoxicated that the Freethinker should be Stalin-stupefied." I fully agree. But there is some excuse that can be made for the God-intoxicated Christian, but for a Freethinker to be Stalin-stupefied there is none. Books are available, such as "I Was a Russian Worker," "The Russian Enigma," Eugene Lyons' "Assignment to Utopia," which must destroy any illusion the reader may have of a Russian utopia.

It is only natural, however, for Socialists who hold illusions in regard to Stalin's altruism to give him their support in his actions and policy however much it may change during its tortuous imperialistic progress.

When Stalin's policy, however, is recognised for what it is, it does not necessarily follow that Franco's policy should be supported. The natural reaction when faced with two evils is to reject both.—Yours, etc., J. PEPPER.

AN APPEAL.

Sir,—Can any of your readers give me any information about a book of poems, "Ungodly Jingles" by Sholto O. G. Douglas, author of "A Theory of Civilisation." It was published in 1923 by Elkin Mathews. The twenty-three poems it contains are of exceptional merit. I am anxious to know who this Sholto Douglas is. There are several in "Who's Who" but none seem to fit him. Did he write any other works, poetry or prose? If living, he could be approached for permission to reproduce some of these poems in "The Freethinker." It would cheer and encourage many of your readers.—Yours, etc.,

AMBROSE G. BARKER.

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 (Highbury Corner) 7 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY. West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Messrs. E. SAPHIN, J. PAGE, E. HART.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—7 p.m., a lecture. Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—7 p.m., Mr. J. BARKER. Liverpool Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street, opp. Lewis's).—7.30 p.m., a lecture. Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—3 p.m. Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—7-30 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA. A lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room B).—3.30 p.m., general discussion: "Continental Sunday versus English Sabbath." Halifax Branch (I.L.P. Rooms).—7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A lecture.

• F. A. RIDLEY •

His brilliant commentary "Through Socialist Eyes" every week in the "Socialist Leader"

Send 2s. 6d. for 12 issues (post paid) to:—"Socialist Leader," (Dept. F), 318, Regents Park Rd., N.3

# FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

## GOD AND ME

(Revised edition of "LETTERS TO THE LORD")

By CHAPMAN COHEN

Paper Cover

1s. 4d.

Post Free

Cloth

2s. 8d.

## THE BIBLE

- THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH?** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.
- MISTAKES OF MOSES**, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.
- THE MOTHER OF GOD**, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; by post 4d.

## CHRISTIANITY

- CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT?** By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view. Price 2s.; postage 1½d.
- AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY**, A Survey of Positions, by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.
- ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day.** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.
- THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH**, by Colonel Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.
- THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS**, by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 4d.; postage 1d.
- PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS**, by J. M. Wheeler. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

## FREETHOUGHT

- DETERMINISM OR FREEWILL?** By Chapman Cohen. Price in cloth, 2s. 8d., post free; paper cover, 2s. 2d., post free.
- HENRY HETHERINGTON**, by A. G. Barker. A Pioneer in the Freethought and Working-class Struggle of a Hundred Years Ago. Price 7d., post free.
- SPEAKING FOR MYSELF**, by Lady (Robert) Simon. Price, post free, 2s. 8d.
- CHALLENGE TO RELIGION** (a re-issue of four lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester), by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.
- ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING**, by Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d. The four volumes, 10s. post free.
- HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST.** An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 9d.; postage 1d.

- A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT**, by Chapman Cohen. An outline of the philosophy of Freethinking. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.
- THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST**, by C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; by post 5d.
- THEISM OR ATHEISM**, by Chapman Cohen. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 2½d.
- WHAT IS RELIGION?** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.
- GOD AND EVOLUTION**, by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d.; postage 1d.
- WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD?** By C. G. L. Du Cann. An enquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 6d.; postage 1d.
- PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT**, by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s. 3d., post free.
- THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH**, by Chapman Cohen. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.
- THE MORAL LANDSLIDE.** An Inquiry into the Behaviour of Modern Youth. By F. J. Corina. Price 6d.; postage 1d.
- FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST**, by J. M. Wheeler. Price, cloth 4s.; postage 3d.
- SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS**, by G. W. Foote. Price, cloth 3s.; postage 3d.
- GOD AND THE CO-OP.** Will Religion Split the People's Movement? By F. J. Corina. Price 2d.; postage 1d. 12 copies 2s. post free.
- MATERIALISM RESTATED**, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.
- GENERAL INFORMATION FOR FREETHINKERS.** Price 2d.; postage 1d.
- REVENUES OF RELIGION**, by Alan Handsacre. Price, cloth 3s., postage 2d.
- THE RUINS, OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES**, to which is added **THE LAW OF NATURE.** By C. F. Volney. A Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an introduction. Price, post free. 3s. 2d.
- THE RESURRECTION AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS**, by W. A. Campbell. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.
- THOMAS PAINE AND THETFORD.** Six postcards illustrating Paine's birth-town, including a portrait of the great reformer. Price 9d., post free.
- THOMAS PAINE**, by Chapman Cohen. A Pioneer of Two Worlds. An Essay on Paine's Literary, Political and Religious Activities. Price 1s. 4d., post free.

## Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

- What is the Use of Prayer? Deity 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.

**THE PIONEER PRESS**  
41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1