

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Contradiction of Faith

TWO contradictory things, said Dr. Johnson, cannot both be true, but they may both inhere in the same mind. If anyone doubts this, the most casual glance over Christian apologetics should be enough to convince him; for there is scarcely an instance in which controversialists may not be found championing two positions, either of which effectually cancels the other. There is, for example (to prove the providence of God), the thesis that things in this world are arranged in the way best calculated to promote human welfare. Having demonstrated this, the same apologist turns right-about-face and (to prove the probability of a future life) argues that things in this world go so badly that there must be another life in which the injustices and wrongs of this one are corrected. A writer will open a book written to prove that without belief in Christianity morality is insecure, with the statement that many of those who are not Christians are better behaved than those that are. In combating Utilitarianism, many a Christian will argue that to make happiness the end of life is to lower and degrade morality, but that we must believe in Christ because in no other way can we secure happiness throughout eternity. One might compile a very lengthy list of these inconsistencies; they pass almost unnoticed because where religion is concerned no one appears to expect the ordinary rules of logic to obtain. Christian logic moves in a way, at the side of which the traditional vagaries of Providence pale to insignificance.

Generally speaking, an acute apologist would manage to conceal many of these very obvious contradictions. They are not always absent, but they are not sufficiently near the surface to strike the ordinary reader. But in one of his articles for the "Evening Standard" he appears as an exponent of one of the most universal of all Christian inconsistencies. The mission of Christ, it is explained, was to save the world—save it not merely religiously, but ethically and socially. But, quite obviously, the world has not been saved. It has not been converted to Christianity, it has very grave defects in both its moral and social aspects. And to make the case worse, we are not merely told that it was the mission of Christ to save the world, but we are treated to reams of praise of the way in which the example of Christ has transformed human nature, and worked a miracle of moral transformation with human society. How are we to explain the failure? Well, they say, the influence of Jesus—which we are invited to admire in its transforming power—has been strangled by ecclesiasticism; as Dean Inge obligingly explains, "The enthusiasm that ought to be concentrated on the adventure of Christian living is devoted to augmenting the numbers, powers, and

prestige of a Society (i.e., a Church) with a very shady record. Scorn, hatred, and exclusiveness have quenched every spark of Christian charity in ecclesiastical politicians."

That being admitted, one would expect two things. One, that they who complain of the way in which the Church is eaten up by hatred, and envy, etc., and is devoid of "every spark of Christian charity" would leave it; and two, the admission of the complete failure of the Christian mission would follow as a matter of course. But those who complain loudest remain in the Church, enjoying the prestige that comes from its numbers and power and wealth. And they explain, with elaborate inconclusiveness, that the Christian Church has been diverted from its original purpose. Christianity has not failed because it has not been really tried. Well, but what is that but a confession of the most complete failure? "The history of the Church," says Dean Inge, "is a history of decline." "The Christian revelation came before mankind was ready for it." The case gets worse and worse. God gets incarnated for the purpose of giving mankind a special message, and no one pays attention to it. He founds a Church, and that goes steadily from bad to worse—except in the matter of salaries, the need for an increase of which is the one thing on which these Churchmen are agreed. God's judgment is evidently as questionable as his alleged power. So we are asked to admire the drastic failure and world-wide success of the same thing at the same time and by the same agency. We must praise the Jesus who is unconquerable, but who everywhere suffers total defeat. His success turns out to have happened in either the very remote past, for which no clear evidence has ever been given, or will happen in the distant future, of which we obviously know nothing at all. I wonder what Dr. Johnson would have said to all this.

A "Pure" Fallacy

There is no greater superstition connected with Christian apologetics than the belief that there existed a pure—morally pure, and socially admirable—form of Christianity to begin with, but which became gradually overlaid with abuses that sprang up. Take up any reputable and authoritative history of Christianity and the picture drawn century after century is the complete opposite to this. Reliable annals of what is officially the first century of Christian history are altogether wanting; but if one takes the New Testament as supplying this, two things become clear. First, that the aim of the first Christians, including the teaching of Jesus Christ, was not motivated by ethical and social ideals, but by purely religious ones. The utmost aimed at was a brotherhood of believers, united in terms of their adherence to certain crude superstitions. And side by side with this, still keeping to the New Testament, Christians are accused of all sorts of vindictiveness and

intolerance, and in the language of Paul, of crimes worse than those existing among the heathens. Afterwards, century by century, we have it pointed out how much morals suffered by the dominance of certain Christian teachings. Moshier does this when speaking of the second century. Of the third century, he says that Church rule "was soon followed by a train of vices, which dishonoured the character and authority of those to whom the administration of the Church was committed." Of the fourth century that "the number of immoral and unworthy Christians began so to increase, that the examples of real piety and virtue became extremely rare." The fourth century saw the Christian Church in power, and from that time the denunciations of the immorality of Christians becomes more pronounced, and the details more revolting. Readers of Lecky, Lea, Milman and others will be quite familiar with the pictures drawn, and nothing in ancient history could be worse. Dean Milman said, very emphatically, that in its relations with the non-Christian peoples, "Christianity has given to Barbarism hardly more than its superstitions and its hatred of heretics and unbelievers."

Of course, so long as one is content to accept vague and general statements as to the existence of some "pure" Christianity which became demoralised through secular ambition and social demoralisations, such articles as the ones noted will easily pass muster with those who read, not for knowledge or insight into historical processes, but to have their prejudices confirmed. It is when one asks for a place and date, for a latitude and a longitude, that trouble begins. It is also easy to make out a case if one reads into the New Testament exactly what one wishes to find there. This is no new feature in the history of Christianity. Erasmus, writing in the sixteenth century, drew the following picture:—

In general, it is the public charter of all divines to mould the divine oracles until they comply with their own fancy, spreading like a curtain, closing together, or drawing them back as they please. Thus indeed St. Paul himself minces and mangles some citations he makes use of, and seems to wrest them to a different sense from what they were first intended for. . . . Thus, when that apostle saw at Athens the inscription of an altar, he draws from it an argument for the proof of the Christian religion; but leaving out the great part of the sentence, which perhaps if fully recited might have prejudiced his cause, he mentions only the two last words, viz., "To the Unknown God"; and this too not without alteration, for the whole inscription runs thus; "To the Gods of Asia, Europe and Africa, and to all foreign and unknown Gods."

'Tis an imitation of the same pattern, I will warrant you, that our young divines, by leaving out four or five words in a place, and putting a false construction on the rest, can make any passage serviceable to their own purpose; though from the coherence of what went before, or follows after, the genuine meaning appears to be either wide enough, or perhaps quite contradictory to what they would thrust and impose upon it. In which knack the divines are grown now so expert, that the lawyers themselves begin to be jealous of an encroachment upon what was formerly their sole privilege and practice.

The race of Christian apologists differs really very little from age to age. Whatever changes they undergo are superficial only. In essence they remain the same. Somehow or the other Christianity must be made to square with what is popular or with what is unquestionably and patently true. Religion is just what you care to make it. The unfortunate thing is that one so seldom comes across the ambition to make it either a thing that is intellectually respectable or morally useful.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

REMEMBRANCES OF A NATURALIST

THE eminent evolutionist, Dr. A. R. Wallace, the co-discoverer with Darwin of Natural Selection, was early acquainted with Radicalism and Freethought. As a young workman, he attended the evening gatherings of Secularists and other advanced thinkers at a Hall of Science in John Street, now Whitfield Street, W.

In his instructive autobiography, "My Life," Wallace tells us that: "It was really a kind of club or mechanics' institute for advanced reformers among workmen, and especially for the followers of Robert Owen, the founder of the Socialist Movement in England. Here we sometimes heard lectures on Owen's doctrines. It was here that I first made acquaintance with Owen's writings and especially with the wonderful and beneficent work he had carried on for many years in New Lanark. I also received my first knowledge of the arguments of Sceptics, and read among other works Paine's 'Age of Reason.'"

In one of these Freethought writings, Wallace was first confronted with the problem of evil. The arguments arrayed against the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent deity in the presence of so much unmerited suffering, he found unanswerable. So when visiting his home he repeated the arguments that appeared conclusive to his father, fully expecting him to seem shocked at his son's knowledge of infidel teachings. Instead, he merely remarked that these matters were insoluble mysteries, while showing no desire to pursue the subject further. Wallace therefore concluded that even if the existence of God was not disproved, the work "did seem to prove that the orthodox ideas of his nature and powers cannot be accepted."

Wallace was also deeply impressed by a tract entitled "Consistency" by Robert Owen's son, Dale Owen. This tract's chief aim was the reprobation of the revolting doctrine of eternal damnation then almost universally taught in Anglican and Dissenting Churches alike. Dale Owen contended that if those who accepted this horrible doctrine only realised its full meaning, life to them would become a nightmare. To illustrate this truth Dale Owen cited a sermon designed to make listeners realise what eternal punishment means. The preacher in question anticipated Father Furniss in his realistic pictures of Hell where souls were roasted throughout the endless ages. And even after countless centuries of excruciating agony had come and gone, the suffering sinner was no nearer the end of his torments. "I myself," avers Wallace, "had heard such horrible sermons as these in one of the churches in Hertford, and a lady we know well had been so affected by them that she had tried to commit suicide. I therefore agreed with Mr. Dale Owen's conclusion that the orthodox religion of the day was degrading and hideous, and that the only true and wholly beneficent religion was that which inculcated the service of humanity, and whose only dogma was the brotherhood of man."

To the elder Owen and his writings, Wallace was deeply indebted. The doctrine of determinism which teaches that our characters and actions are conditioned by heredity and environment and that the theory of free will is a chimera was a cardinal

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principle in Owen's philosophy. He regarded as a mischievous fallacy the assumption that each individual is personally responsible for his actions and that any deviation from conventional practice should be severely punished. Many thinkers, past and present, have proclaimed the doctrine of necessity, but none in Wallace's view has seen "so clearly as Owen did how to put his views into practice; no one, perhaps, in private life has ever had such opportunities of carrying out his principles; no one has ever shown so much ingenuity, so much insight into character, so much organising power; and no one has ever produced such striking results in the face of enormous difficulties as he produced during the twenty-six years of his management of New Lanark."

To the objection that Owen's scheme would lead to mental and moral anarchy, Wallace replies that all down the ages, every Government has acted on the theory of freewill with disastrous results, whereas Owen transformed a discontented, vicious, intemperate and supercilious community of 2,500 people into a comparatively happy, hygienic and prosperous association, despite the absence of punishment and evidently without discharging anyone for ill-doing. Also, "all this was effected while increasing the efficiency of the whole manufacturing establishment, paying a liberal interest on the capital invested, and even producing a large annual surplus of profits, which in the four years 1809-1813 averaged £40,000 a year, and only in the succeeding period when the new shareholders agreed to limit their interest to five per cent. per annum was the surplus devoted to the education and general well-being of the community."

Owen only received an elementary schooling as a boy, but he became a voracious reader. As a youth he worked in retail businesses but later entered into partnership with a mechanic named Jones. Some 40 men were employed by their firm in producing the then newly-invented mules for cotton spinning, but they soon sold the concern.

Owen then entered the service of a manufacturer named Drinkwater as manager of a factory employing 500 men, women and children. He thus assumed the entire responsibility of "the first fine cotton spinning establishment by machinery that had ever been created."

Although inexperienced, Owen soon mastered his onerous task, and so improved the business that his salary was raised to £500 a year and for a time he became a partner with a quarter share in the concern.

Ultimately in 1800, Owen became partner and director of the New Lanark mills and espoused the daughter of Dale the original proprietor. He now had an opportunity of putting his theories to the test. It appeared a forlorn hope, for the workers were far from ideal characters. Moreover, the 500 children engaged in the mills were mostly recruited from Edinburgh workhouses who toiled from seven in the morning till six at night. Naturally, the children loathed their slavery. Many absconded, while even those who served their apprenticeship then frequently migrated to Glasgow or Edinburgh to increase the poverty and misery of those cities. In his work on Owen, Sargent avows that the people who dwelt in the village adjoining the Lanark mills "lived almost without control in habits of vice, idleness, poverty, debt and destitution." Theft and drunkenness, and high prices charged for inferior commodities, mostly obtained on credit, added to the general squalor and misery.

When Owen announced his intention to sweep these evils away, his friends thought him a scatterbrained dreamer. Yet his achievements were so astounding that he became world famous. He overcame Scottish suspicion of a Southerner; he converted his partners, and established stores in which his workers could purchase for ready money goods of excellent quality at a reduction of 25 per cent. in price. This innovation was soon apparent in the better dress, health and comfort of the community. Finally all doubt of Owen's humanitarianism was dispelled during a scarcity of cotton when most other mills were

closed. As Wallace notes: "He continued to pay every worker full wages for the whole of the four months during which the scarcity lasted, employing them in thoroughly cleaning the mills and machinery, repairing the houses, etc. This cost £7,000 which he paid on his own responsibility; but it so gained the confidence of the people that he was afterwards able to carry out improvements without serious obstruction."

Plans were improvised for the instruction of the children who were not permitted to work until ten years old. He secured good masters and superintended the infants himself. The children were to be kindly treated and no punishment was allowed. Open-air exercises were encouraged and dancing and other recreations were eagerly welcomed.

A deputation came to New Lanark from Leeds to ascertain the truth of the much discussed success of Owen's educational system and their findings completely confirmed the favourable opinions so widely expressed.

After ten years' unqualified success, Owen's Quaker partners who always disliked the dancing and childrens' drill, obtained the surrender of the management to their own keeping. This concession was a false step on Owen's part. Moreover, his open attacks on the evils of religion alienated most of his fashionable supporters. Still, the most serious error of his splendid career was his leaving New Lanark in reactionary control and dissipating his handsome fortune in founding societies composed of untried and unreliable adults which his previous experience should have shown were foredoomed to failure.

But, as Wallace observes: "Notwithstanding this one fatal error due to the sensitive nobility of his character and his optimistic belief in the power of truth to make its way against all adverse forces, Robert Owen will ever be remembered as one of the wisest, noblest, and most practical of philanthropists, as well as one of the best and most lovable of men."

T. F. PALMER.

ADVICE TO PARENTS

Listen Mothers, Fathers, all--
When the parson pays a call
Asking why you don't let Freddie
Go to Sunday School--be ready!
Tell him it's against your will
Soiling infant minds with swill.
Fancy telling young beginners
They are miserable sinners!
Little toddlers scarcely able
Yet to say their Twice-time's Table
Hear the parson read unblushing
Dirt you couldn't clean by flushing;
Chanting in an unctuous tone
What he says is Lesson One
From the Book of Holy Writ--
If that's holy, I'm a nit!
I would hate a child of mine
To believe such stuff Divine.
Written in the savage ages
Filled with blood and lust it's pages;
Ignorance and lies containing--
What a book for infant training!
Musty Churches, dim and dark?
Not for your child! In the Park
Plenty of fresh air he'll find--
Not poison-fumes to dope the mind!

W. H. WOOD.

DETERMINISM OR FREEWILL? By Chapman Cohen.
Price in cloth, 2s. 8d., post free; paper cover, 2s. 2d.,
post free.
THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS, by C. G. L. Du Cann.
Price 4d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

What is the evidence that Christianity at any time has ever prevented war? The real influence of Christianity on war appears to have been in the direction of giving it a sacred character, without divesting it of its horrors or making it less frequent. Again the example of the duel may be cited. The duel existed in pre-Christian times—although not so commonly as in the Christian period. But it was then an undiluted expression of individual hatred. Under Christianity, the disappearance of the old judicial forms and the substitution of trial by ordeal, the duel took on the character of a solemn appeal to heaven, and God was really expected to protect the innocent man in a duel, as in walking blindfold across heated bars of iron. So in the case of the soldier and the profession of arms generally. As part of the general attempt to control the whole force of society, the Church made the profession of the soldier almost a sacred one. And the supernatural element that was implicit in the duel was held also to be implicit in contests between nations. It was an appeal to God on a larger scale; and we see the survival of this in the same appeal being made by all Christian nations to-day when going to war. And there is simply no disputing the statement that by giving war a religious aspect the frequency of war became assured. For several centuries—from the tenth century onward—religion was one of the commonest causes of war; and all the fanaticism and savagery arising from religious conflicts became inseparable from them. Religion regularised and sanctified war without making it less common or less bloody.

Meanwhile, the Churches are thinking out numerous plans for developing Christianity in this country. Well, we can understand a business firm advertising a new article, or even booming old ones. But the claim is that religion is neither new nor indispensable. It is one of the oldest of things, and everybody knows it is there. The churches are there, and everybody knows that the clergy are anxious for the people to come in. The clergy are there, and they assure us that people cannot do without religion, and that if they try to do without it their whole nature cries out for it. And yet religion simply cannot live without these numerous artificial stimulants to interest. There must be one long, perpetual round of exhortations, missions, and more or less theatrical displays to keep some people up to the attendance point. And only one here and there seems to realise that all this elaborate machinery is proof positive that religion is not really indispensable. It is something that nearly everybody can do without with the greatest of ease. And when they have gone without it, they never know that anything is missing until the parson comes along and points out that something is wanted. And if going without religion did not involve going without *him*, he would not realise the tremendous loss either. Whoever heard of a parson troubling about a religion that could be believed or practised without a parson?

Every level-headed person feels that the task before us—and others, not more than us—is to see there is now a road to a more civilised Germany. It is not a question of loving Germans, but it is part of our well being—unless it is resolved to kill, say, 50 or 60 millions of Germans. And that is simply impossible. So we come to the latest phase. Somehow Germany must be put on its feet. Not because we are blind to the evils Germany set going, but in order to secure the safety and progress of the world.

This is where the Church steps in. It aims at creating a feeling that Christianity is the only thing that can produce a newly-born Germany. The religious papers are being covered with plans and methods of "civilising" Christians with the Churches, or most of the larger ones, operating as chief agents. The connection between—even if full marks were given for the work done to create a rebirth of the German people—Germany and the revival of the Christian religion is not very clear. If the Christian Churches could not prevent the war, what ground have we for believing that they can wipe away the evil consequence of the war now that it is over?

A tremendous waste of time and money is going on all over the country in voting whether or no Sunday cinemas should be permitted. In nearly every case there is a vote in favour of Sunday "shows," with a majority vote of about four to one. One of the latest votes is in the Cathedral City of Canterbury, with a vote of about five to one. We wonder when some of our dare-devils in Parliament will make a move for freedom of entertainments on Sunday, and be permitted to act as they do on the other six days of the week? A free Sunday has always proved itself to make for a better Sunday. There is less humbug with it and more harmless enjoyment. Special Sunday laws in favour of a stupid superstition, while we proclaim to the world that we stand for freedom, is evidence that we are mistaking changes for freedom.

Perhaps one of the best proofs that people need Sunday enjoyments is the poor quality of films that are shown on a Sunday. The places are thronged no matter how poor the play is, and the controllers of the shows don't care a damn how poor the performances are so long as the money rolls in. But the need for Sunday plays is quite clear.

Bishop Walter Carey has decided that "Man by himself is not strong enough to stand by himself. What we need is to become a God-fearing people again." Which, being interpreted, is that man alone is a pretty bad lot—unless Bishop Walter Julius Carey looks after him. All we can say is that if man has fallen to that level the sooner the earth is well dosed with extra-powerful atomic bombs the better.

There is no denial that civilised men—even semi-civilised ones—have inherited their gods just as they have inherited a rudimentary tail. But civilised people do not create gods. Disguise it as we may, refine it as we may, the idea of a huge, overmastering personality creating and governing the universe is clearly a conception from the brain of a savage. If it had not been there it would not have been born at all. Civilised men do not create gods, their function is to discard them. And that is the reason why even a Christian sees that the gods of other people are fashioned in the likeness of man. He is looking at the gods of other people from the standpoint of civilised commonsense. When he looks at his own God he forgets his science, and his science and civilisation lapses to the level of savages. One day it will be discovered that the truth is the same for all gods. The world will at least be saved from duplicity.

The Rev. Stead gives us, in the "Christian World," a picture of what he considers the ideal Christian. It is certainly not the Jesus of Christian history. He is just a decent Christian. But the very essence of the Christian teaching was salvation in the next world, which was due to nothing but the grace of God. Look at the story of the thieves on the cross. It is rather interesting to find that the salvation of Christians would not have been made certain if they were just honest, useful citizens. The essence of Christianity is supernaturalism. Take that away and the structure falls to pieces. It is, however, interesting for a writer in a Christian paper declaring that real Christianity is what we have always known as the secular view of life.

One of our provincial papers asked the other day, "If we can spare thousands of millions to carry on a war, can we not spend as many more millions for the betterment of the homes of our people?" Of course, but we are doing it. Still, war does bring people fame, while those who work hard to make better homes and better peoples have not nearly the same pull that war has. You see, we are a Christian-bred people. When we get fewer Christians we may discover that we have started creating a better people.

"The Catholic Herald" admits sorrowfully that Rationalism and Atheism have bitten deeply into every Church. Things must indeed be threatening when that confession is made, and by the "great lying Church." At last we can bear witness that the word of Rome can be accepted. But perhaps the greatest blow the Roman Church has had for a long while was when the Pope ordered his followers to the election of the King—and the King lost. Italy ceased to be a monarchy. The Pope said no more.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- H. S.—We have noticed the Penge Youth Council and are writing to the clergymen for further information.
- C. W.—The Editor's "Almost an Autobiography" will be reprinted as soon as the paper supply improves in quantity. The book will probably be enlarged.
- D. CAVANOH.—We quite endorse what you say. It has been a real loss. The paper shall be redirected.
- L. R. WATERS.—Thanks for compliments.
- S. T.—The best book we know of recent years dealing with the "race" question is "Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race," by M. F. Ashley Montague (Columbia University Press, New York, 1945). The price is 22s. It could be ordered through a London bookseller.

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.

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SUGAR PLUMS

It looks as though we shall soon have in this country an almost settled five-day working week. Indeed, that should be one of the aims of society as a whole. Machinery can turn out goods at an almost unbelievable rate, and also one of the results should be less compulsory work. This stage has been brought about not by one or two men but by "Man." The man who first ventured on a floating log and made the discovery that it was easier than walking, laid the foundations of what has come to us in the shape of one of our giant ships. Whether we take a ship, or an engine, a suit of clothes, or a musical instrument, the story is the same. Things are not made by this or that person, but by the accumulated work and skill of the race.

Quite naturally and properly that should have been shared by society as a whole, and to some extent that is recognised by all. The share is very unfair. But one reform has reached a marked stage. Little more than a century ago men and women spent the better part of their lives by just working. Little more than a century ago women were placed in the coal pits, and dragged loads of coal, and outside the pits boys of seven, eight, and nine were sent up chimneys to brush down soot, and were often choked to death as a consequence. To read now how the abolition of child labour was opposed in the House of Lords is enough to make one wonder whether it was not all a dream.

But a further change is taking place. From working twelve and fourteen hours adults have gradually shortened the working day, and it is now rapidly approaching a five-day week's work. That result is as certain as daylight. Of course there has been the usual cry that men are not making the best use of their time, but that is not a good argument against it, but is rather evidence in its favour. The better use of both time and money will come. Meanwhile there is another body of people that were rather alarmed at the situation that has arisen. Belief in religion is

weakening. We need not prove it, the clergy, the last to let that kind of statement go to the outside of privileged circles are now shouting it from the house-tops that, not merely are forms of religion on the wane, but the most dreaded of all enemies, "Atheism," is on the march. Atheism is growing and the Churches are getting full of emptiness. The preachers have tried giving in church some wishy-washy social addresses with perfunctory bows to God, but still people prefer to stay away.

What is done? Five days at work, two days freedom to do as one will! Some sodden genius of a parson set loose the idea, "Could we not induce the people to take their day of enjoyment on Saturday and devote Sunday to God—and the parsonage?" We do not believe they will. After a day's excursion, with all the healthy fatigue that health creates, it is not likely that men and women will wish to spend their freedom at Church. They will wish to stay longer in bed, to lounge round the garden or to have a second day's enjoyment. All will be stronger with a five-day's work than ever it has been on a six-day. We foresee that the people will not be taken in by the public plea for working men to spend a day in "enjoyment" in Church. The clergy must try something better—or at least pleasanter. People did not stay away from Church because they were tired, they stayed away because they were sick of the whole religious performance. The clergy have been found out.

CHOCOLATES FOR GOD

CHOCOLATES for God. Jujubes for Jesus. Mintballs for Mary. Peppermints for Peter. Christ's couponless confectionery. Licquorice for all sorts, ices for sinners.

Oh, come come, you Freethinkers go too far . . .

But, steady on my good Christian friends, the originator of this ribaldry is the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead, of the London City Temple, who was lecturing recently in Belfast. I paid 2s. 6d. to get in (the cheapest) and the larger part of the hall was well filled at 5s. a seat. Mr. Weatherhead is an attractive platform personality, and while he contrives to give the impression that he is reasonable and scientific, works all the emotional tricks of the actor. The chairman had remarked that everything he says is related to the needs of the people. In his opening sentences Mr. Weatherhead told us that £100,000 was needed to rebuild the City Temple in London, and, while affecting to jest about the charges for admission, he made it clear that we would also be touched for a "retiring collection."

The title of the address was "The Free Churches in the New World," and it was stated dramatically that "all the churches had failed to win men to Jesus Christ." This was a bombshell, and was meant as such. After an eloquent pause, there was a triumphant shout, with magnificent gestures to high heaven, ". . . but the Church is eternal, a supernatural entity . . ." So now we know.

Who may I ask is this "man in the street" whom Mr. Weatherhead appears to be so anxious about? He used that expression umpteen times, indeed, the whole talk tried to influence this creature, to make it clear that "Christianity was a way of life, a divine fellowship. . . ." I had just passed hundreds of men in the street (most of them were women) and they were lined up for the pictures. With these folks, Bob is a greater Hope than Jesus. I don't think the reverend gentleman would have been very successful in "offering Christ" to them.

A good point was made that whereas in the language of Science words and terms are clearly defined, with theologians of the different schools, although in seeming agreement on many points, these things differ widely in their interpretations. For instance, "I believe in the resurrection of the body" may mean corpses jumping up for judgment, or as Mr. Weatherhead believes, "the persistence of personality."

Yet, in the next breath, in a burst of eloquence, we are told (an historic happening was implied) of the opening of the heavens and a voice saying "This is my beloved son . . ."; we had to get "In living touch with God," and "I have seen God, and life is going to be different."

Now, the reverend Mr. Weatherhead ought to give us something above the intellectual level of the Salvation Army; indeed, he is capable of doing so. But when an educated man uses the language, the conceptions, the imagery of the savage, in speaking to a large audience, clearly he is playing upon the ignorance and credulity of his hearers.

Let me be quite clear as to what ideas we wish to convey by the use of certain language. When an old soldier tells me he faced death, that is figurative language which we both understand. Neither of us believes that Death is a huge malevolent man, *but the savage believed that*. So did the Bible personages. And, to a great extent, so do the "believers" of to-day. When they talk of meeting God face to face, they are all mixed up, objectively, subjectively, and every other way, and it is the business of the clergyman to keep them eternally guessing at things alleged to be divine mysteries.

Not one solitary word was said in the address as to what could or should be done by the "Free Churches in the New World" to palliate the social ills of to-day. Except that "the man in the street" should be welcomed into the Fellowship of the Church, even though he disbelieved in all their tenets! There's broadmindedness for you.

The essential thing is to "win souls for Christ," that's the whole doctrine in a nutshell. The appeal is, as always, to a narrow little self, the saving, at all costs, of one's own soul. Mr. Weatherhead's lecture was "the old, old, story," and was not one whit more intellectual than the evangelism of the street corner. Indeed, despite his pleasant speech and happy smile (we were told he is a favourite on the radio) the whole effort was on a very low plane. Mr. Weatherhead's jokes were of the mother-in-law, my wife says, sort of thing; of course, all very "nice" and B.B.C. Lord, how easily a clergyman gets away with what would yield a real comedian a raspberry. Thirty years ago I wrote a skit for this paper in which a fanatic says now that he is saved he could knock hell out of the drum. Even then the joke wasn't original. Mr. Weatherhead works it off again. He ought to be thankful that I was the only "man in the street" present.

If the Christian humour was tiring, the "uplift" was painful. When a boxer gives obvious signs that he contemplates a big punch, he is said to "telegraph" it. Our lecturer gave us ample warning that he was going to end on a note of salvation. He actually worked the ". . . But if it's true" stunt. "Supposing Jesus Christ is right," and instead of being merely a good man, "he was really God, coming down out of heaven." So what?

He told of a young woman who was employed at Bourneville. She was unhappy in her work and did not get on well with her lady supervisor, whom she described as "a cat" (laughter). I had seen that lady, said the lecturer, and agreed with the description (more laughter, the cats in the audience outnumbering all others), also with her views on the foreman (renewed and general laughter). Well, the young girl got saved, and a transformation took place in her attitude to work and authority. In answer to a query of mine, she gave voice to one of the most sublime utterances I have ever heard. I hope no one will laugh at her remark, for it was made seriously and soulfully:—

She said simply:—

"Now, I make chocolates for God."

I remember the name of Spurgeon, and I once took the chair for R. J. Campbell, but surely the City Temple has fallen on evil days? Or was its message always as foolish? Would it be worth while to spend £100,000, at a time of acute housing

shortage, to rebuild a "sacred edifice" dedicated to chocolate for God sublimity?

It is getting a bit stale now to tell us that the world has gone mad, yet the lecturer took some time to describe facetiously, and with stereotyped illustrations, London on the rush, foolishness and futility everywhere. But why not introduce a sublime example? "The man in the street" almost literally without where to lay his head, working at building a church, while the Reverend Leslie D. Weatherhead, M.A., talks,

Tripe for the Temple.

J. EFFEL.

THE APOCALYPSE—"REVELATION" ON REVOLUTION!

(Concluded from p. 311)

THOUGH professedly written by a "theologian," the book takes only a secondary interest in theology. In the dedicatory epistle—probably written after the main body of the work, the author vehemently attacks the Gnostic followers of Paul, "the doctrine of the Nicolaitines, which thing I hate," "the synagogue of Satan," who "eat meats offered to idols," thus relaxing the letter of the Jewish Law, and adapting the Messianic cult of Jesus to the practices of Gentile society. And to this attack follows one on "those who say they are Jews and are not," a scornful and transparent reference to Paul, the recently deceased "Apostle to the Gentiles," no doubt, the chief of those "who say they are apostles and are not."

Once, however, the author gets down to the serious business of his "revelations," the domestic conflicts in the Messianic Church soon fade into oblivion, and a series of terrifying visions reflect the coming celestial intervention of the Messiah in the current Roman-Jewish conflict. It is not necessary to recall these visions, couched as they are in obscure Babylonian eschatology and astrological symbolism, in detail. Who does not recall those famous images of the great Dragon, Satan, "the accuser of his brethren, whose tail drew a third part of the stars of heaven"; that is, the numerous apostate Jews, who, like the historian Josephus, deserted the now hopeless national cause? Or the "Woman crowned with twelve stars," Israel, the mother of the Messiah, who fled before the Dragon? Or the mystic number "666," "which is that of a man"; of "Nero Caesar," the recently deceased Roman "Anti-Christ," the terrible persecutor of both Christian and Jew? (In a later edition made by the author in the reign of Domitian, c. 96 A.D., the then current legend about the return of Nero from the East has been inserted in the text. The conjecture of M. Couchoud that the "mark of the beast," which he reads as "616," means the god, Attis, seems disposed of by the explicit statement of the author that "it is the number of a man." Attis was a god, or, from John's point of view, a devil. To be sure, "the Beast" has been variously interpreted! Napoleon, for example.)

Throughout this stupendous phantasmagoria one central idea runs like a golden thread which gives unity to the whole tangled skein: the burning hatred of the Jews for Rome. A hatred which cannot be apprehended apart from that terrible orgy of looting, conquest, and massacre, which subjugated the Mediterranean world to the yoke of Rome between the end of the Second Punic War (202 B.C.) and the writing of the Apocalypse. (Cf. our earlier articles on "the social origins of Christianity.")

Being, after all, only a fairy tale despite its dramatic intensity, the Apocalypse was bound to have the conventional "happy ending" appropriate to this class of literature. So, ably preceded by "the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," who did to Rome what every insurgent Jew wanted done to her in the way of devastation and pillage, the Messiah himself, "who is Faithful

and True," led his heavenly cavalry in a more fortunate "charge of the Light Brigade" to final victory over Rome. What Spartacus and John of Gischala (the defender of Jerusalem in A.D. 70) could not achieve, victory over the Roman eagles, was accomplished in the final conflict of "Armageddon" by the Messiah.

It was, we may add, in this hope so vividly portrayed by "John" that Christianity actually began. The Pauline subtleties with their emphasis on salvation in the next world and not in this, came into their own later. It was, indeed, the Romans, by destroying Jerusalem, and therewith Jewish Christianity itself, who ensured the final victory of the "Apostle of the Gentiles" over the undoubtedly primitive Christianity of John and his Messianic zealots. For, despite the "wish-fulfilment" which culminated in the celestial victory of Armageddon, here below in this terrestrial world the war went badly for the Jews. The Temple was burnt down, and their national-religious heroism succumbed to the numbers and discipline of the Roman legions. Nor was the new Messiah, Bar Coekba, "the son of the star," any more successful sixty years later when the Holy City, Jerusalem, was razed to the ground and a Pagan temple erected on the site of Temple of Jehovah: "The abomination of desolation" mentioned in the Gospels.

The Apocalypse was a wish and not an accurate prophecy. But there is no trace of this in the extant text. "John" ends in a carnival of victory celebrations by the victorious "Saints." Some of the more lurid details seem to have been suppressed by ascetic Catholic editors!

Robert Eisler has referred to the long struggle of the Jews against Rome as "World-empire" versus "World-revolution." One should always be cautious in applying modern phraseology to the so different civilisation of classical antiquity. But, if a trifle far-fetched, this picturesque description of their epic conflict is substantially true. (cp. Robert Eisler—"John the Baptist and the Messiah Jesus"—also our earlier article already cited). And the Apocalypse has its unique interest as being the only surviving literary work which reflected the point of view, that embodied the hopes and fears, the passions and the aspirations of the ultimately vanquished side. It is in this last sense that it is, indeed, "revelation on revolution"! The poignant scene in the Apocalypse wherein are revealed the fallen Martyrs in the Jewish war: "these are they who came out of great tribulation and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. . . . Blessed are they who die in the Lord from henceforth," predicted that actual terrestrial tragedy, when a little later, the Jewish garrison amid the burning Temple refused the last Roman request to surrender with the sublime rejoinder: "the world is a better temple to God than this one," and themselves died to a man in the burning ruins.

When considered, as it should be, as a work of tragic drama, the Apocalypse has an historic interest and grandeur possessed by no other book in the N.T. and by few in ancient literature. For there we see, as it were in a mirror, for such is the book's intensity, the instinctive reactions of the Jewish people in and through this historically correct standpoint, the Apocalypse ceases to be primarily a work of religion or even of literary art. It becomes the very epitome of that unconquerable hope, of that underlying hope which has always placed its millennium in the future, whereas other nations, much less sorely tried by history, have always relegated theirs to the past, which has alone carried them through so many and so tragic vicissitudes from Nero to Hitler: of its age-long defiance of a history that has seemed permanently hostile, and of an ineluctable destiny.

F. A. RIDLEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

H. G. WELLS—FREETHINKER.

SIR,—Travelling in France and Belgium I was saddened to see in the French papers news of the death of that fine and courageous spirit, H. G. Wells. Not long ago, apropos of some writing of mine, he wrote to me, speaking of "The Freethinker" in terms of warm admiration and appreciation; and although the foreign papers here tell me nothing of the circumstances of his death, I do not doubt that he died as he lived, one of the finest and least inhibited of authors. Being away from my papers, I am unable to quote the exact terms of his appreciation, but I remember that they were extremely definite and that they referred with gratitude to the useful influence your paper had upon his mind in the past.

I think this attitude of Wells which will surprise none acquainted with his vigorous and emancipated mind should be placed on record, and I cannot conclude without a word of homage to the genius now for ever silent and lost to a world that sadly needs more of his calibre.—Yours etc.,

C. G. L. DU CANN.

OBITUARY

J. ABBOTT

It is with genuine sorrow that we have to chronicle the death of Mr. J. Abbott, the Secretary of the Leicester Secular Society. The Society never had a better officer or one who devoted himself more to the Freethought Movement. His name will remain with those who knew him as one who loved to labour in what Meredith called "The best of all causes." Good causes have the capacity of calling to its service the best of men. It is to that order that "Jack" Abbott belonged. The funeral service was conducted by Mr. Hassell who delivered a well-chosen speech, full of feeling; while for himself personally it was the loss of a deeply loved friend. All who knew him mourned the loss of an upright and brave man.

C. C.

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., Messrs. ATFIELD and LUPTON.

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

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Accrington Market.—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—7 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORTT.

Cranshawbooth.—Friday, August 30, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Hafton.—Monday September 2, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Liverpool Branch N.S.S. (Ranclagh Street, opp. Lewis's).—7-30 p.m.: A lecture.

Oswaldtwistle.—Thursday, September 5, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Hall, Mechanics' Institute).—6-30 p.m., Mr. R. B. MITCHELL: "Hope."

FOR SALE.—Rare and valuable book: "The Three Trials of William Hone," containing the "Political Litany," "The Sinecurist's Creed," "John Wilkes's Catechism," etc. Cloth; pub. 1818. Only genuine offers accepted.—Mr. N. Charlton, 24, Bankhouse Street, Burnley.

AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY, A Survey of Positions, by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

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.

WOT . . . ME?

WHEN I joined the Tees-side Branch of the Secular Society, I had visions of this large area being a mass of energetic Freethinkers. Actually there is no semblance of organisation, and less sign of activity except from about three people.

Certainly there seems some need of having smaller units, but in the mean time the individual member looks for some means of helping the Freethought movement.

The possibilities of the individual worker centres round his acumen and abilities.

Great harm has been done to the movement through those that would speak and could not. Touch bottom and admit your limitations. If therefore you are like myself, with no heart for public speaking, but with a natural bent for the common-sense of rationalism, there is much for you to do.

Most of us are aware that religious buildings can have a certificate issued making them rate free. They must however use the building only for the so-called "divine worship." Check up on your district, and make sure that our pampered pets, the clergy, are not exploiting the situation using the places for concerts, dances, whist drives and jumble sales, and charging an admission to enter.

Remember no local authority is tender to you in the matter of rates. By becoming pseudo musical hall, the church is having an unfair advantage of the legitimate trader in entertainment. Obtain a list from the local rating officer of the rated and/or unrated religious buildings and then get to work on the Town Clerk. Your local reference room will give you all details and past test cases to cite as data.

You will be helping the rates and stop the church thinking they are everybody and can break the law without check.

The exact wording of the minute we had Darlington Council pass read as follows: "The Finance Committee resolved that notice be given that religious buildings will only be exempt from rates, provided that they are not used for purposes of profit." I also enlisted the aid of that worthy man, H. H. Martin of the L.D.O.S., and he is only too willing to tackle any Church using buildings for pastimes where they should be rated. Dog eat dog.

When will Freethinkers realise that their weekly paper, the "Freethinker," is not an illegal paper of some under-cover movement. It is bought furtively and read under the blankets by many. My copy is read in the public vehicles, when I have finished it I do not wrap up the fish and chips in it, but leave it in bus or train or pass it on in some manner.

When in your local book store don't let freethought books blush unseen . . . after selecting your goods, pull all the rationalist literature out where it can well be seen. I found a stack of Macabes "Papacy and Politics" under a lot of religious stuff and every time I go in the shop I note with satisfaction that they are going down. . . . Every little helps.

When you fill in a document that asks for your christian name do you delete the expression "christian" and insert "First"? If not you are letting water in, as we say round here. This christian name business is not merely just general use but part of the strength of the church. If you think this is being fussy, disillusion yourself by trying to get your Identity Card amended. On this you are described as a Christian . . . do you like it? I refused to sign my card, declaring that it would be an illegal and inaccurate document if I did. I appealed to the Home Secretary and the Attorney General and held out for many weeks. I was visited one night at 11-30 by the C.I.D. and compelled, under the police pressure, to sign it. I was ill at the time and for some time after, but at least if I did not win my case I must have made someone think.

The Press, without exception, favours the church. All the petty tittle-tattle that may be mouthed by the clergy is given tremendous free publicity. I bought several Yorkshire papers but never saw a line devoted to the Secular Conference at Bradford. You have to right this state of affairs by diligent use of the correspondence page of your local "rag." Your articles will be hacked up and put in the "Letters in Brief," but they do some good. Looking through my efforts I find I have touched on the following subjects: God and War; Bombed Churches; Raffles for Church Altar Fund; Ex-Miner Vicars; Women and the Ministry; etc.

Point out to the editor, too, the advertising revenue lost to the Press through the banning by the Church of pool adverts. See that your reading room has freethought papers in and that the lending library has its quota.

I would think that a weekly advert. by rationalists in the local Press would be a good thing. Say: "Freethinker, 3d. Weekly, from your newsagent"; or "Now try Atheism . . ." It would not be expensive. Whilst on the subject of publicity, do you realise that it costs nothing to put on the back of the envelope you are sealing some little slogan, such as: "Buy the 'Freethinker' . . . for inquiring Christians." It is so unusual to see matters atheistic in every-day affairs that such little efforts give the jitters to the clergy, for they size it up out of all proportion to the effort given.

If you have children of school age you will see that they are withdrawn from religious instruction, and that the school prominently displays the notice to the effect that this is in order.

It would be interesting to hear what other individual Freethinkers are doing or have done. Above all the best advert. for the Freethought movement is the honest and sterling character of the individual. It is no easy matter in these days of racketeering to keep perfect, but the Freethinker that takes an active and genuine interest in local affairs, and by example impresses others with his humanity and consideration, is doing the movement nothing but good.

It has just occurred to me that those living in areas being rebuilt should consider the question of new registry offices. Why not submit to the local authority your idea of a re-designed office that could accommodate fully every sort of secular wedding from the spectacular to the quiet sort?

J. COULTHARD.

STILL LOOKING BACKWARDS

Extracts from Sykes's Local Records of Remarkable Events, etc.

July 26, 1756.—The populace in Newcastle honoured Admiral Byng by an effigy, set on an ass, elegantly decorated with proper labels, etc., preceded by a person on a mule, with a white standard, on which was this motto: "Oh, back your sails for God's sake, a shot may hit the ship." On each side of his hat was "Bung," and round his waist was, "This is the villain that would not fight." Having paraded the town, the procession halted at the carrion burning place in the Flesh-market, where a gallows was erected, on which, after being severely treated, he was hung, the prepared funeral pile lighted, and he, with ignominy and reproach, was suffered to perish. At Gateshead, Shields, Sunderland, and other places, this noble admiral was similarly caricatured.

May 22, 1758.—The following curious notice circulated at the time, shows the then "Sports at Swalwell Hopping": "On this day, the annual diversions at Swalwell, near Newcastle, will take place, which will consist of dancing for ribbons, grinning for tobacco, women running for smocks, ass races, foot courses for men, with an odd whim of a man eating a cock alive, feathers, entrails," etc.!

Could this last performance be considered an improvement upon that barbarous and cruel practice, cock-fighting?