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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

The Twilight of the Gods

All my life I have loved books, and would have them as my own. I do not think I was overrun with a love of possession, it was because I loved knowledge, and, curiously, I never gained from borrowed books as much as I did when the books belonged to me. I do not think that was indicative of greed, because I have given books freely, and have learned that others are book-lovers—at my expense. Now I have in front of me one of these books I love. It contains the handwork of one named Lucian. The writings are contained in two large well conditioned volumes, eleven by eight inches in size, with one thousand and fifty pages of reading, translated from the Greek by William Tooke, F.R.S. (may he be blessed), dated 1820. If that does not make the mouths of collectors water then I do not know the type. I have had the book for many years and it is in fine condition.

Who now was Lucian? There is not much mystery on that head. He is said to have been born in a village in Armenia about A.D. 130. There is a story concerning him that two fairies visited him while he slept. One offered him a good lucrative profession, which he rejected. The other offered him knowledge and intellectual culture which he accepted. There must have been many priests—Christian and others—who would have wished he adopted the other line. My huge volumes, so far as I know, carry all his works, but they will do. It is also remarkable that while Christian leaders were doing what they could to wipe out pagan literature, they did not destroy the writings of Lucian. I thank heartily those who spared, or preserved, the writings of Lucian, also the fine translation of the writings by William Tooke, F.R.S., for my benefit. I do not think the priests, ancient and modern, will join me in thanking the translator.

Most of the writings of Lucian were produced after he had reached his fortieth year. They nearly all consist of satirical works, but instructive of contemporary life and behaviour. He was certainly an Atheist. All the absurdities and impostures of the day are dragged out, and the skill and wit with which the whole is done, place Lucian in the front ranks of his kind. His satire and ridicule stung and worked for good where elaborate argument would have left little influence. Like all brave men who have not shrunk from attacking falsehood boldly, Lucian's writings gave offence plainly, and awakened much opposition. The superficial ones who were unable to see that his ridicule was only a cover for a burning hatred of all falsehood, cried out, "many do to-day, that attack by wit is obnoxious. Lucian was far too great a man for thinking only of clear expression." With nearly all his satire, there is a serious note which tells of a clear mind and a courageous man. He was

trying, as one of his predecessors, Perseus, would have said, he was trying to pull the old woman out of the heart of man. Honest endeavour to discover truth, a genuine desire to do good, he never mocked. In one of his dialogues, in which he pictures himself, he says he is a hater of imposture and false pride, and a lover of sincerity. There is little warrant for not accepting truthfulness.

Naturally he was not loved either by the pagan religion, or by the Christians who had adopted much of the pagan superstitions, while throwing out their better features. There was another cause for Christian hatred for Lucian's attack was applicable to the superstitions of both Pagan and Christian. The rising Christianity and the decaying paganism were both satirised with equal strength. But one may need pay too much attention to the cries of the god-ites. In ordinary matters it may be a wise policy to assume that a man is truthful until he is proved to be a liar. Where religion is at stake it is just as wise to assume that man is telling lies before he is proved otherwise. It was the great Erasmus who laid down that policy, and it was needed. For centuries Christian ignorance and bigotry buried the names and work of Lucian. He was brought to life again at the period of the Renaissance, which set the Christian world alive again. The meaning of Renaissance is "re-birth" and it was the re-birth of non-Christian science, art and literature that awakened the western world. Of Lucian's work, Erasmus spoke in terms of great praise. Other famous men such as Rabelais and Swift were largely indebted to him. Even Jeremy Taylor borrowed from him the opening paragraphs of his "Holy Dying."

All of Lucian's dialogues possess the qualities of wit and grace, and all valuable lessons if they are wisely read. To Freethinkers, there are many of his writings that yield valuable lessons. There is one which will give readers a taste of his quality. The title of the attack is "Zeus the Tragedian." The opening scene is in heaven, and the chief deity, Zeus, is very disturbed in mind at events that are taking place in Athens. One of the gods walking about the streets says:—

"I found a good-for-nothing scamp of an Epicurean named Damis, and the respectable and excellent Stoic, Timocles, arguing together. Timocles was perspiring with eagerness and hoarse with shouting. Damis was turning him to ridicule and driving him to distraction with his coolness. The subject of discussion was ourselves. Damis maintained that we had no concern with men and their doings, and almost denied our existence. Indeed, this was what he meant, and many of his audience applauded. Timocles took our part, passionately and indignantly. He argued well for Providence. He was not without his friends, but he is unequal to his work . . . The party in favour of Damis grew larger every moment, till, seeing what was likely to happen, I ordered up night to bring the meet-

ing to an end, leaving them to finish the argument tomorrow . . . You see the danger . . . From men we derive our glory, our honours and our revenues. Let men once conceive that we do not exist, or that we have nothing to do with them and incense and prayer will cease to be offered to us. We shall be left sitting idly here in heaven, and with banquets and ceremonies being at an end, perishing of hunger. It concerns us all, gentlemen, it concerns us all. We depend on a single man to continue."

All the gods agreed that the situation was a serious one. The gods everywhere live on the praise and prayers of humans. For man to ignore gods is to destroy them. There is no exception to this rule. The Greeks had behind them the memories of the gods who died for want of service. The gods would insist—through their preachers—that prayers must be sent them. The God Momus shrugged his shoulders and remarked that he was only a small god and the matter was not very much to him. But the big gods? Of them he said:—

"It is not surprising that men should have ceased to believe in gods. What other conclusion could they arrive at when they see the things around them? Good men neglected, perishing in poverty or slavery, and profligate wretches honoured and powerful. We affect surprise that men who are not fools decide not to put their faith in us. We ought rather to be pleased that there is left a single person to say his prayers. They perceive that whether they pray or don't pray, go to church or don't go to church, makes no difference. And we are receiving our deserts."

The position looked black, and the wife of the great Jupiter asked her husband, "How can it affect you? You are Jupiter." But Jupiter well knew that gods can exist only when they are fed. He replied: "Dear wife, the concern of the gods is come to express the truth that we stand on the edge of a razor whether we are any longer to be acknowledged or to sink into mere names."

The situation grows worse for the gods. Jupiter recognises that gods exist only so long as men believe in them. He admits that their champion is doing his best, but he also recognises that the unbeliever is making all the running. Danis, the Atheist, appears to be winning, and the champion of the gods is making blunder after blunder. Everything depends upon the champion on earth, and after studying the positions, the conclusion is gained that "either we shall continue in our hereditary positions or we shall be counted as non-existent."

That, of course, is what every god has to face sooner or later. Gods, angels and devils exist or they do not exist, and the question of whether God is good or bad is not worth bothering about, save for the purpose of throwing something in the eyes of Man. The Greeks went to the root of the matter as they did with other subjects—a boil is a boil whether it be dangerous or merely painful. One of the minor gods, Momus, at last rose and gave some real talk. He said:—

"O, Jupiter, we are here by ourselves. Answer me upon your conscience whether the concerns of earth have interested you, whether people were good or bad? You cannot affirm it with truth . . . If the truth must be spoken our whole employment is to sit here and pay no regard save that our obligations are diligently

paid. Everything else may go on as it can. It therefore serves us right if mankind, after a while, will open their eyes. Such men as Epicurius and Danis, will at last laugh at our faces and stop our mouths for ever and ever."

There was considerable discussions about the gods helping their champions. Some argued that the best policy would be to remain silent and trust to Atheism being forgotten. Some of the minor gods said frankly that it serves the big gods right. They thought mainly of themselves. The gods decided to watch the discussion between the two champions on earth. What a show the B.B.C. might make of the troubles of gods? And if it would put some of these dialogues on the air what a stir it might make among the superstition-soaked B.B.C. preachers.

(To be concluded)

CHAPMAN COHEN

"SEVEN AGAINST HEAVEN"

VI

"Thomas Paine"

THE 18th century was, as already remarked, essentially the age which witnessed the successful popularisation of the great scientific and philosophical innovations of the supremely creative 17th century: the age of Galileo, Descartes, and Spinoza. However, the popularisation, if less original than the creation of new ideas is equally useful and necessary. And the French writers who prepared the way for the French Revolution, and who hopelessly discredited the old order in Church and State in the eyes of all thinking people, long before that event occurred with Voltaire at their head, were probably the most brilliant band of popularisers in the history of the Western world. It is however, France represented the brilliant dissemination of ideas—the ideas themselves, the fundamental political and religious ideas, both of Voltaire, Rousseau, and the "Encyclopaedia," which originated in England, which, in this last respect, played a more original, if less spectacular, role. We may, in fact, say with regard to the 18th century that, in the contemporary diffusion of ideas, England supplied the ideas and France the lucid genius which was responsible for their universal diffusion.

For the political ideas of the "Encyclopaedia" stem from the Whig ("Glorious") Revolution of 1688, whilst the Deistic ideas of both Voltaire and Rousseau were taken directly from the English Deists of the early 18th century. English Deism has thus, an important, indeed, epoch-making place in the history of European thought. But it must be admitted that its individual leaders, brave men as their fearless promulgation of unpopular tenets shows them to have been, make a poor show, as and when compared with the bright intellectual constellation which gathered around Diderot and the great "Encyclopaedia." Toland, Tindal, Collins, Annet, etc., were, no doubt, rather more than the "ragged regiment," as a generally sympathetic historian (Sir Leslie Stephen) rather scornfully described them, but in contemporary France, which their ideas, nevertheless, so profoundly influenced, they were surpassed in literary brilliance by many writers of the second rank, and do not even begin to compare with the major constellations in the Gallic firmament. There was some truth in the later gibe of the arch-reactionary Edmund Burke, that, already in his day, no one read, or took seriously, the English Deists.

There was, however, one English Deist and Republican who was a great many people still read and take very seriously indeed. And, it is safe to add, will continue both to read and to take seriously long after Burke's own flashy rhetoric and facile generalisations have gone to join the snows of yester-year. This was Thomas Paine (1737-1809), who was both one of the masters

of English prose, and that *rara avis*, a saint in politics; who played a front-rank role in two revolutions, the American and the French; and who all but caused a political and social revolution in Tory England; which, in view of England's paramount role in the current Industrial Revolution, might have been even more useful and far-reaching in its effects than either of its French or American contemporaries; who, in his American "Crisis," wrote one of the greatest pamphlets in the great English language; and who has left mankind an imperishable social legacy in the American "Declaration of Independence," of which he was part-author; whose "Rights of Man" did more to popularise the ideas of political and social democracy amongst the English-speaking peoples than did any other book in the English language; and, last—if, indeed, there is any "last" to the good wrought to mankind by "Tom" Paine—but the reverse of least, whose "Age of Reason" did more to demolish the anthropomorphic biblical God of Anglo-Saxon theology than did any other book written in or since his time.

Such was Thomas Paine, the English—very English!—Voltaire," and the equal of his great French contemporary in both literary power and far-reaching influence. Such was "Tom" Paine, whom every reactionary in Church and State vilified in his lifetime, and whom every "respectable" historian, from his own day up to, and including, ours treats invariably either with savage hostility, supercilious patronage, or—that favourite device of the Tory ruling-class of Great Britain—a conspiracy of silence. For just as the Catholic Church has branded the last great Pagan Emperor of Rome, Julian, forever as "the Apostate," so the memory of the last great English Deist has been similarly traduced, and as "Tom" Paine, has been denied even posthumous civility." But, if the persistent hatred of the reactionaries of two centuries is a sign of lasting influence, then "Tom" Paine must be one of the most influential men who ever lived!

Here we have, unfortunately, only the available space for the briefest outline of the long, stormy, and spectacular career of Thomas Paine in three countries and in three revolutions. Born in Theford, in Norfolk, in 1737, and dismissed from the Civil Service (Customs) for what would to-day be described as "strike action," Paine made no mark in English life or letters until he emigrated to America at the age of 37 (1774). A step which he took on the advice of Benjamin Franklin. The revolt of the American colonies was just then coming to a head, and Paine took the side of the Americans against George the Third and his Tory satellites. In the War of Independence, Paine played a role which American historians are only just beginning to realise. His great pamphlets, "The Crisis" and "Common Sense," which were read by Washington's orders to the American armies in the field, played a leading, perhaps a decisive, role in stimulating the hard-pressed Americans to fight on. And Paine, hardly less than Jefferson, was responsible for the "Declaration of Independence."

Refusing all pecuniary rewards, as was his invariable custom, Paine returned to the Old World, and after a brief residence in England, where he built its first iron bridge, he was drawn into the whirlpool of the French Revolution. In 1791, his "Rights of Man" gave a devastating reply to Edmund Burke's flashy "Reflections on the French Revolution." The book soon became, and long remained the gospel of political Radicalism in a Britain then verging on an imitation of the French Revolution. Its huge sale led to repeated attempts at its suppression by the ultra-reactionary Tory Government of Pitt, and to the prosecution of its author for High Treason. Paine escaped to France on the nick of time and was "tried" and (needless really to add) condemned in his absence.

In France his adventures were hardly less extraordinary. He was elected to the French "Convention," voted with the Girondins (Moderates) against the death of Louis the 16th, and was subsequently imprisoned by the Jacobins during the Reign of Terror (1793-4), and only escaped the guillotine by an accident.

After the fall of Robespierre, he was released, and completed his famous anti-Christian "Age of Reason," which he had begun in prison. After writing a number of minor works—of which his "The Rise and Fall of the English System of Finance" is, perhaps, the most important—he returned to America during the short-lived Treaty of Amiens (1802-3), when the seas were no longer infested by English cruisers. He died in 1809, his death hastened by American religious bigotry, caused chiefly by "The Age of Reason" with its devastating attacks on the then infallible and sacrosanct Bible. In the course of his two generations' Odyssey, Paine was the fighting standard-bearer and synonym of political and religious revolution in both the Old World and the New. For a generation after his death his books enjoyed both a huge clandestine circulation and the fiercest persecution by the ruling-class. "Tom" Paine was, beyond any doubt, the greatest iconoclastic and revolutionary figure in the entire history of Britain.

A word may be usefully added on his fundamental ideas. Politically, he was what would now be termed a radical rather than a socialist. (In one famous passage he verged on Anarchism: "government, like dress, is the badge of our lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise"). But his influence in converting the advance guard of the English masses to republicanism cannot be over-estimated, and bore fruit, later, in the Chartist movement. However, in our present connection, it is with the author of "The Age of Reason," rather than of "The Rights of Man," with whom we are just now concerned.

"The Age of Reason," Paine's greatest work and, simultaneously, crowning blasphemy, must, on any showing, be regarded as an epoch-making book. After it, it is not too much to say that the Bible has never been the same to Anglo-Saxon peoples as it was before Paine's masterpiece appeared. If God, indeed, wrote the Bible, Paine re-wrote it! One can, indeed, say that its English "reviser" made a new book out of the old, and that all modern students, and, indeed, all modern theologians who are not absolutely half-witted, to-day accept the main postulates of the author of "The Age of Reason." That the Bible is not, in any strict sense of the word, a "Book" at all, but a whole literature, and one at that which contains every conceivable cultural level from primitive fetish-worship to great literature; and must, in brief, be criticised and "treated like any other book": in other words, that the Bible is *not* the work of an unerring infallible god, but of *very* erring and fallible men, this message, which is the very heart and core of "The Age of Reason," and which seemed so unspeakably blasphemous to the "fundamentalist" England of its great author's own day has now become a truism even in modern theological circles desperately eager to be quit of the traditional orthodoxy which Paine has made forever untenable. If, writing long before the rise of modern archaeology he inevitably made some minor errors, he was yet surprisingly accurate in his "commonsense" criticisms of the biblical legends; whilst his fundamental contentions have become truisms. One can truly add that, though Paine called himself a Deist, yet the content of his greatest work belongs, essentially, to the history of Atheism, since no man has done more, or probably so much to kill the popular god of anthropomorphic theology as did "Tom" Paine.

His adventures did not end with death. William Cobbett, George Borrow's "fierce old Cobbett," Paine's fervent admirer, removed his bones for burial in England, and lost them on the way! So that, as Mr. Hesketh Pearson has happily remarked, the bones of Thomas Paine, like the living man himself, "belong to no nation."

It has been wisely observed that the best test of any recorded civilisation is the status which it confers on women. Similarly, it may be as accurately observed that there exists no better test of the scientific character of any modern history of England than the degree of justice which it accords to "Tom" Paine.

F. A. RIDLEY.

ACID DROPS

A special call has been made by Church of England leaders concerning the state of religion in this country. Of course, it is not difficult to explain why religion is falling back and at so rapid a rate. It may be fully expressed in the old saying that while one may fool some people all the time, one cannot fool *all* the people all the time. The Christian religion is exhibiting the fate of all religions and all gods. The decay of religion would have gone on war or no war. What has happened is that the decline of religion has been quickened by the world war. But war or no war, the fate of the gods continues.

As for the social lawlessness that is taking place we are only reaping the consequences of war on a very great scale. There is not, there never has been, a war that has not ended with a greater or smaller disruption of social life. The instinctive shrinking from taking life is evidence of this; and naturally we are not likely to change unless we control all the evil forces that accompany war. It is left for our religious leaders to become more contemptible than ever when they talk of the anti-social developments as an outcome of the falling off of belief in God.

Generally speaking, when a man has goods for sale that are not of a new type he not only pushes his goods, he points to their widespread use as evidence of their value. But the Bishop of Chichester tries another plan. Standing in his cathedral he invites his listeners to consider the way in which the people spend Sunday. There they are, he says, lying on the beach, lounging on deck chairs, reading papers, eating ices, walking up and down the promenade and pier, and he tearfully asks: "What belief have they in the supernatural?" and he answers, "Very little indeed." We agree with the bishop. The beach on a fine day will knock over the praise of God and the attractiveness of a Church. And worse still, if the weather was of the blackest there would still be empty churches and mournful bishops.

But we cannot let the matter stop there. The supernatural has been pushed into the people for nearly two thousand years. They have threatened people, they have oven punished them for not going to church. Now they beg for Church attendance, and their words have no effect. They do not even think it worth-while to explain their absence from Church; they prefer the beach, the countryside, and the fresh air to the supernatural. God has lost his attractiveness. Poor, poor parsons. Theirs is truly a hard look-out.

The "Church Times" writes against the Russian plan that it is in connection with certain countries working against Christianity. We dare say that is to some extent true, but is it more than we have been doing for many, many years in many, many countries. We sent, or allowed to be sent, Missionaries to overthrow, if they could, the religions of the invaded peoples—China, India and Africa, with numerous peoples. We not merely did it, but we bragged about it, while many at home winked the other eye at the wealth that was grabbed. All things considered the English Christian newspapers are the last ones that should object to the introduction of religion or anti-religion into another country.

Mr. Christopher Brunel writes:—

"I wonder whether there would be all the fuss about Mr. Silkin's bold plan to build what we understand to be a well-designed power station at Bankside, if St. Pauls were not a religious edifice."

We have no doubts whatever on the matter. There are many similar cases, but no bother arose when religion was not in question. Nor should we lose sight of the fact that a mere row—in the interests of religion—may help the heads of the Church who are now struggling for their lives.

Some people are never satisfied. For example, we know that the new Education Act insists on religious teaching, but the Bishop of Chelmsford is still very dissatisfied. He recently opened the Chelmsford Church School, built at a cost of £18,000, and wants Churchpeople to be also proud of the fact that there are 220 Church schools in Essex—"where," claimed the Bishop, they could "give our young people the right kind of education, an

education which equips the whole man, mind, body and spirit." But we have always understood that this was the object of all schools—whether called board schools, council schools, or even public schools. We suspect that what the Bishop really means is that in Church schools there should be no Government interference in teaching children as "Gospel truth" what we all know to be Christian balderdash. Even under the religious education in Government schools, it is going to be difficult to prove to children that Jesus, after being put to death, was seen flying to Heaven.

We wonder whether Canon J. E. Fison is as simple as he appears to be? If so, he deserves a very, very large medal. He says that Christianity is not losing ground because there are fewer interested in religion; the churches are empty because the clergy are too fond of remaining in their churches. He says the clergy must save themselves from becoming "unconscious hypocrites." He thinks that if the clergy go among the people empty churches would be no more. Curiously it never occurred to us that the people were longing to see more of the clergy, and it was the modesty of the clergy that kept them back. We should be delighted to capture a few parsons of the timid variety. We live and learn.

By the way, there was a great deal said about the good done—for the churches—from the marching of "Commandos." It sounded romantic, but it looked like a cheap town march of a very hard-up fair show. We would like to see the Commandos march renewed. It certainly wakened up a number of unbelievers and induced some to action with regard to anti-religion.

We don't know anything about Major Beamish, M.P. But he is down on the present Government. He told Mr. Shirwell that the biggest snobs are the men "sitting on the Socialist front bench in the House of Commons." That may be true, but then Major Beamish should not try to keep all the snobs on the other side. The Major must expect to find some snobs on his side of the House. Another claim is that the wives of Socialists "swarm round the country and have never been worth a thousand in their lives." We are afraid we cannot sympathise with the Major. He cannot expect that all the snobs are on the Tory side. They must be scattered. And as to not being worth a thousand, we agree that some of them are not worth a thousand pennies. But, again, the Major must not expect all the undesirable characters to be found on one side of the House. He is showing envy, not good statesmanship.

Some people achieve foolishness. Others are born that way. Dr. Sherwood Taylor—if truly reported—belongs to the first order. He is reported to have said that "science cannot deny the possibility of the miraculous," and in addition, miracles "occur only under conditions that science has never studied." But that is sheer nonsense. A large body of books, written by specialists, have analysed the quality and nature of alleged miraculous occurrences. To put the little among the great we may point out that the editor of this journal issued a volume of about three hundred pages dealing with nothing else than the alleged "miraculous." Dr. Sherwood Taylor has been pulling someone's nose.

Mass observers have been trying to discover the general attitude of people to religion. They find that two-thirds of the Metropolitan citizens never go to Church. Also only one woman and man in four doubt the existence of God. These are very loose results because it appears to take no notice of the number of people declining to give any answer. But even these results are worth noting.

Warrington people have won the right in their own town, and with one voting, have achieved in this free country to see Sunday shows. Some of the undeveloped townspeople stuck on the walls before the voting, "If the devil had a vote, how do you think he would use it?" Our answer would be that he would be in favour of Sunday shows. It was Satan who induced Eve and Adam to get knowledge. It was the devil that told men to stand up for what is good for humans. We are sure that if Satan were there he would go away with, "Poor things, now they will be able to stand up and enjoy themselves." We salute our Satan. He is one of the finest characters in the Bible.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. JAMES.—We believe the person you name is dead. We made inquiries some time ago and that was the conclusion we came to. We appreciate your high opinion of "The Freethinker." We give our best personally, and we have always a good body of men and women who find a delight in writing for the "One and only."

S. BORDELS.—Cuttings are always welcome. Even when they are not of immediate use they are welcome.

H. FARMER.—Will make inquiries and let you know if successful.

W. MORRIS.—We have no further inquiry, and do not think we shall.

S. WILLIAMS.—We may deal with the B.B.C. and the "more open" platform. We use that phrase "more open" because there is no fair managing at present. The Freethinkers are permitted to speak and then stopped. But the B.B.C. is drenched with religious services and religious lectures. There should be so many addresses in favour of freethought that would have the same quantity as Christians. It is a meal that should be given, not a mere crust that is probably cooked in a particular way that even Christians can find no room to complain.

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.

Notice 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

Mr. Chapman Cohen has had many letters of late asking whether there is any possibility of reprinting some of his out-of-print books. The three books that are most called for are his "Almost an Autobiography," his "Religion and Sex," and "Christianity and Every." All these have been out of print for some time. The only difficulty in getting them printed is scarcity of paper. They will be republished as soon as possible. Meanwhile we should be thankful for anyone who has friends in the printing line willing to lend a hand to send us names.

In Oswestry there have been Sunday entertainments since the troops were stationed there. Some of the "very good" did like it but they submitted, but the majority said that it was a bad move. Now the troops are leaving and there are two separate groups with regard to Sunday Cinemas. What we call "very good" people wish to have the Sunday shows, partly on the ground that it reflected for the better the people living in the country. The clergy do not like it because it tends to keep people from going to Church. Another group do want the shows because while they have no objection to people going to Church, they see no reason why they may not spend Sunday as they wish. It is a ridiculous situation which results from over-doses of a ridiculous religion.

It is surely time that this interference with personal liberty be stopped once and for all, and we are quite sure that if members of Parliament were not afraid of bitter opposition from irreligious voters a Bill covering the legalism of Sunday

Cinemas would be passed. Those who do not want a Sunday performance—out of Church—can go to Church without being interfered with. But the liberty to those inside the Church should be permitted to those outside. Why do not some members of the House of Commons do what they can publicly to break down this religious tyranny? We know it would require courage, but even members of Parliament should think about it. We are a free people. We wonder whether that is true?

In England there is no pretence that church attendance is not getting steadily worse—or better. Some of the clergy in Scotland seem to be adopting a different way of putting it. They advertise that what they want is more men in holy orders, which gives the impression of Churches full of worshippers, waiting for clergymen to do the preaching. We have our doubts. The dry rot of the Churches occurs everywhere. You can't fool all the people all the time. A man may never get the right angle to understand Christianity. Once he does the parson's game is up.

The Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. began its open-air work with a real good meeting. Mr. J. W. Barker was the speaker and two clergymen who intervened as opponents actually helped to demonstrate the weakness of the Christian position. The Branch will hold meetings every Sunday at Castle Street, Kingston-on-Thames, at 7 p.m., and deserves the support of all local friends of the movement.

Will all those interested in reviving the South London Branch N.S.S., communicate with John Seibert, 6, Templar Street, S.E.5, with a view to discussing ways and means of renewing open-air activities.

BOOKS AND READERS

I

THE National Book League issued some years ago a small pamphlet giving the titles of the ten favourite books of a number of well-known people. These were R. A. Butler, John Gielgud, W. J. Haley, Augustus John, John Masfield, J. B. Priestley, Bertrand Russell, Sybil Thorndyke and G. M. Trevelyan, a good representative selection from our public life. The books chosen as their favourites specially interested me as an omnivorous reader myself, and I wondered how many I also had read, and, particularly, exactly what part religious books had played in the selection.

The only forthright Freethinker of them all was Bertrand Russell, and so I did not expect anything religious from him; yet curiously enough he was the only one who mentioned what could be called a book on religion as one of his favourites. This is Gilbert Murray's "Five Stages of Greek Religion," a most valuable work, and one we should expect a thinker and philosopher of Bertrand Russell's calibre to have studied. One of his favourites also is Lucretius, another choice we could expect of him; the rest are all social studies with the exception of Arthur Waley's translation of some Chinese poems. There was no fiction in his list, but in that of Dr. Trevelyan we get nothing else. I wonder how many of our readers have read Richard Jefferies' "Bevis," that lovely study of a boy in the country (if I remember it aright) which I was glad to see in Dr. Trevelyan's list, as well as Stevenson's "Treasure Island" and "Kidnapped" both two of the finest books ever written of their kind. And I do not see how anyone can leave out "Lavengro," surely a masterpiece if ever there was one. Yet the only other reader who selects it is Mr. W. J. Haley.

Dame Sybil Thorndyke, I was glad to see, had "Treasure Island," and I was still more pleased to find Herman Melville's extraordinary masterpiece, "Moby Dick," in her list. Personally, I feel that Melville must be reckoned as a giant in literature. That he was not so considered by the reading public

in the America of his day was a tragedy which he must have felt and which I think embittered his last days.

That "Moby Dick" should be also chosen by Mr. J. B. Priestley does not therefore surprise me—nor does his selection of George and Weedon Grossmith's "Diary of a Nobody." This is one of the books which is a perennial delight to all who can appreciate wit and humour, one of the all too few books which can be read over and over again. I feel sorry for anybody who has missed this minor masterpiece, so typically English in its freshness and subtle approach.

Our Poet Laureate puts Dante at the head of his favourite books—a choice one cannot perhaps quarrel with as no doubt he sees that writer with the eye of a fellow poet. For myself, I must make the sad confession that I found not only Dante but, alas, actually Milton, almost completely boring. Nobody else chose Dante anyway, and nobody mentions Milton.

Mr. Haley, who is the Director-General of the B.B.C., very surprisingly gives Winwood Reade's "Martyrdom of Man" as one of his favourite books. I say very surprisingly because how anybody having read that book could allow the childish and almost incredible tosh to be broadcast in the name of religion is beyond me to explain. But it was good to see his selection of Arnold Bennett's "Old Wives Tale" and Stendhal's "Scarlet and Black" both in the first rank of fiction. Mr. Haley is the only one who gives Plato a place in his list, and he gives Conan Doyle's delightful "Through the Magic Door" and Havelock Ellis's "Impressions and Comments"—both huge favourites of my own.

Another surprise is that Mr. Gielgud is the only one who mentions Boswell, yet for thousands of readers his "Life of Johnson" has always been in the front rank. And what are the preferences of a great artist like Augustus John? It was good to find in his list such a magnificent medieval masterpiece as Malory's "Morte d'Arthur," that strange fascinating glimpse of a romantic world so far removed from ours. Who was this Malory who could write in the fifteenth century so thrillingly of glory and romance? We have never found out for certain, but what an artist the man was! It is difficult to praise him too highly.

And a man who loves his Malory is almost bound to pay homage to Charles Reade's "Cloister and the Hearth," easily the greatest historical romance in the English language—though "Henry Esmond" runs it close. Yet, Mr. John is the only one who refers to it, Mr. R. A. Butler evidently preferring "Henry Esmond." Mr. Butler is the only one too who gives James Morier's "Hajji Baba," a choice with which I am heartily in accord. "Hajji Baba" should never be allowed to go out of print. He has chosen "Pickwick" as one of the books by Charles Dickens he prefers—Dame Sybil Thorndyke's choice being "The Old Curiosity Shop." "David Copperfield" was nobody's selection, and both "Vanity Fair" and "Ivanhoe" are absent from the lists. Dr. Trevelyan is the only one who gives Scott at all, and he prefers "The Legend of Montrose" and the "Antiquary" both of which, I am bound to admit, show Scott at his finest.

Poetry looms not very largely, but Mr. Butler is quite right in selecting Quiller-Couch's "Oxford Book of English Verse," one of our finest anthologies. Mr. John plumps for Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"—again a great choice—and Mr. Masfield champions Chaucer, Donne, Gray, Rossetti, Blake, and Homer, and how can anyone loving poetry quarrel with him? And as a man who loves the sea, I am not surprised that he included "Anson's Voyage Round the World," one of my own great favourites as a boy—and as a man.

But these nine lists afford many surprises. Where is Shakespeare? Surely no one can deny that a one volume Shakespeare complete is the greatest book in the world, alike for poetry, for drama and romance, for knowledge of life in its fairest and foulest aspects, for beauty of language, for everything in short that goes for great literature? Yet Mr. Gielgud, a fine actor,

chooses Granville-Barker's "Prefaces to Shakespeare" rather than the plays themselves. He appears indeed to prefer the plays of Oscar Wilde—and I can hear some of our young moderns saying, "Why not?" Hazlitt's "Dramatic Criticisms" is another choice and, rightly, Pepys' "Diary." Dame Sybil seems oblivious to the claims of the theatre in her list, but she is the only one who gives us Lewis Carroll's immortal "Alice." I would find it difficult to omit that whimsey of a book out of any list I compiled.

And if Shakespeare is thus rather cavalierly dismissed, what are we to say of the complete omission of the Bible? No book in the world has had the publicity the Bible has had; no other book has been printed so continuously and in so many languages, and certainly no other work has ever produced such vast literature explaining it.

That Mr. Butler, who was almost frantic to get the Bible back into our schools as a permanent institution, and that Mr. Haley, who has gladly handed over his B.B.C. to parsons and priests—taking the utmost care at the same time that nobody can dispute the claims of the "Holy Book," never mention the Bible in their lists is surely something astonishing and difficult to explain. Or is it?

Not only the Bible, but nearly all religious masterpieces have been ignored in the lists. The almost hysterical adulation that always accompanies Newman's "Apologia" should have given him a mention somewhere, but most of the favourite books are fiction and, I must agree, somewhere near the best in that department.

In fact, if the preferences in literature of these eminent people are anything to go by, all the Churches must have a pretty severe headache.

H. CUTNER.

WHERE IS GOD?

It is one of the most common commonplaces of old age, and even of advanced life, that the world is neither as wise, as good, nor as happy as it was some thirty, forty or fifty years ago. Men speak too much from their own feelings. They are the victims of their own personal equations. They attach too much importance to their own real or fancied experience. And when the pessimistic mood is upon them a slight earthquake portends the approaching end of the world, or a war between two countries is the last herald of the universal Armageddon. The truth is that human progress is definitely perceptible only by comparing different stages of society separated by considerable intervals of time. You cannot see a plant growing by watching it. Strange as it may seem, a parent perceives the growth of children more clearly than their parents. And husband and wife who love each other, spending their lives in intimate intercourse, fail to notice as others do the traces of the hand of time upon each other's face and form. How, then, is a man who knows only his own age, and that chiefly from the newspapers, which are read today and forgotten tomorrow, to tell whether the world is improving or deteriorating? What he can say can only serve as ballast for newspapers that are short of cargo, and almost anything does in the "silly season."

A correspondent in a certain discussion managed, however, to ask a very serious and pertinent question. Seeing, as he thought, that things were going from bad to worse on this distressed planet, he put the query, "Where is God?" Now a brisk answer on that question would be worthy of a better time than the "silly season." It would brighten up the pages of a common newspaper. But what newspaper would admit it?

Where is God? He does not seem to be discoverable for love or money. The clergy talk about him a great deal, but that is a trick of their trade. What they know about him would not fill a volume; no, nor even a sheet of notepaper, and probably not the space of two lines. They pretend to know what he is, they set forth his attributes, they ticket him, so to speak, like an exhibit in a museum. They say he is this, that, and the other. They tell us he is all-wise, all-good, and all-powerful; also that

he is omnipresent, which means that he is everywhere, and what everywhere must be everything—a Pantheistic conclusion that is enough to make the ordinary man of God stand aghast and throw up his hands as if in presence of the abomination of desolation. Yet how can that conclusion be resisted? If the alleged Deity is everywhere, then God is all, and all is God.

But the gentleman who put that pertinent question did not mean, we take it, to ask *where* God is, but rather what he is doing. If he created the world, why did he not make a better job of it? If he rules the world, why does he not regulate its affairs more wisely and benevolently? If he watches over the world, why does he not interfere on behalf of justice and humanity? That seems to be the gentleman's idea, and we defy all the ministers of religion to give these questions a satisfactory answer.

Thomas Carlyle, in his old age, said despondingly to Mr. Froude that "God does nothing now." The philosopher of Chelsea need not have taken so long to discover this truth. He might have perceived it fifty years sooner if he had not been blinded by the religious prejudices—or, as they are generally called, the religious principles—of his early training.

It is perfectly idle to try to burke this question. The people are going a good deal further on the road of scepticism than the clergy imagine. Besides the men who go to church, there are the men who do not go, and never will go; and they have their thoughts on the subject of religion, although they do not confide them to the ears of the professional soul-savers. Many years ago, about the top of an omnibus, we overheard a couple of men talking about a shocking murder. They were rough fellows with honest instincts, and, without being able to use fine language, they could see a point as well as a clergyman. "Well," said one of them, "they may talk about religion, but I don't see why somebody or something didn't chip in when a poor innocent girl was being trapped to her death. I wish I'd been behind the blackguard."

It was a natural wish, and a sensible reflection. God was behind the blackguard, if we are to believe the clergy; and beside him and before him, and under him and above him. God was with him when he fetched the poor girl from her room, God was with him when he went into the chemists' shops and bought the ounces of oxalic acid, God was with him when he took his intended victim into the parlour of his father's house, and God was with him when he went out to the scullery to fetch the coal hammer, God was with him when he tore the clothes from the poor girl's body in his brutal and insane lust, God was with him when he forced her raiment down her throat, God was with him when he hammered her head into bloody ruin. God was there all the time. Yes, but how much better for her if a policeman had been about, or any other man with a heart and a mind to interfere.

We do not deny, we are not concerned to deny, the Pantheism of Spinoza, or the idea of God as a vast irresponsible power, governing the universe by general and unchangeable laws, and working out far-distant ends without a special attention to the individual happiness or misery of his sentient creatures. Such is the deity of Pope, who sneeringly asked "Shall gravitation cease as you go by?" He overlooked the fact that the constancy of gravitation is a poor relief to the man whose head is broken by a falling chimney-pot. He also overlooked the fact that the law behind such a law does not come into any sort of moral relationship to his "children." Indeed, it is nonsense to call God his children. He is not even their step-father. To call him "Our Father" is a wretched abuse of language. But the other God, the God of the clergy, the God who sees and hears and knows all that happens—that God is fairly entitled to be called Devil. To know that outrage and murder are to be committed, and not to move a finger to prevent them, is the sublimation of the passion. The outrager is inspired by his lust, the murderer by his passion, but the callous onlooker is the lowest of the three in the ink of degradation.

G. W. FOOTE.

OBITUARY

ALBERT TAYLOR

We regret to announce the death of Albert Taylor, of Waterfoot, Lancs. Although not a member of the N.S.S., his sympathy was with Freethought. He was the local secretary of the Slipper Workers' Union, and a well respected worker in that cause. There was a large gathering at the Rochdale Crematorium, including many representatives of various Trade Unions, where an impressive Secular Service was read by Mr. J. Clayton, of Burnley. The Cremation took place on May 31.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held June 5, 1947

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A.C.), Seibert, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Page, Morris, Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Halifax, Merseyside, Chester-le-Street, North London Branches, and to the Parent Society. Report of the Annual Conference was before the meeting; items remitted to the Executive noted; decisions reached on some matters; appreciation expressed for the excellent arrangements made by the Newcastle Branch. Items under various headings were dealt with from Bradford, Sheffield, Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham and London areas. Help promised towards proposed indoor lectures. Grant made towards the expenses of the International Freethought congress for Birmingham in September.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY; (Highbury Corner) Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD. Thursday, 7 p.m.; Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Contemporary Pessimism," Mr. JOSEPH McCABE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Enfield (Barnes Square).—Friday, June 13, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Blitzed site, Raoulagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.

Nelson (Chapel Street).—Wednesday, June 18, 7-45 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Preston (Opposite G.P.O.).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

ACCOMMODATION required for man and wife in London from July 18 to July 25 inclusive.—Mr. A. KIRKHAM, 17, Wm. Henry Street, Preston, Lancs.

ON PREJUDICES

FREEDOM of opinions and the right to advocate them are essential factors of a high civilisation and of what is called a democracy. But such terms as freedom of speech and democracy, though all very fine, are the mere material superficialities of far deeper propensities. Opinion and the right to individual opinion are the basis for discussion. And the difference between one whose prejudices are his opinions and one whose opinions are his reasoned out convictions, well—the latter may consider himself vastly superior.

It is these prejudices, frequently existing for purely selfish reasons, that often hinder the full play of reason. So here we draw our first inference, that when reasoning out our opinions a sudden appeal to the emotions must be repudiated on account of not befitting the occasion.

Of course it is true that many philosophers consider the subordination of the intellect to the heart as desirable, but even the structure of Positivism breaks beneath the relentless heel of criticism. And indeed the moment a system, however orthodox or unorthodox it may be, begins to exert a detailed influence on conduct, it is at once accused of totalitarian tendencies. This is the inference drawn from past experience, but whether the future synthesiser of systems will profit by the induction is doubtful.

However, to return. Prejudices, then, the prejudices of religion, the prejudices of nationalism, the prejudices of narrow-minded thinking, all these are the real enemies of free thought. But worse by far than any of the above are those prejudices which are inherent. Is any human being more of a mental slave than he who tacitly accepts the religious views of his parents merely because he has not the sagacity for individual thinking? The State, with its system of education, has made it its business to impress the young with the thought that it is their duty to conform to the views of their parents. Could anything be more totalitarian or unprogressive? Surely everyone who reads history must realise that the progress of man during the past has depended entirely upon those thinkers of unorthodox thought?

Freethinking as we have it to day might well be regarded as the fruits of a long and hard period of evolution. During this period the bigoted thinkers have had an integral place; perhaps Dr. Johnson was right when he spoke of the necessity for truth to be persecuted, if only to prove that it is truth, for otherwise it would not survive. But surely now, one might well query, now after all these years of experience, men must be realising the necessity of freethought? Surely now, now that the world is in a state of chaos, now that the necessity to think is stronger than ever, it is high time that prejudices were disbanded.

Prejudices are probably the most subtle things in existence. It yet remains, I think, for a psychologist to classify them into their various categories.

To start with there will be those prejudices impressed upon the individual during childhood. Of considerable mental vivacity is he that breaks away from them. Yet if they are irrationally impressed the child is bound to break away from them once given the freedom the world outside the family circle allows. This is a truth well verified by observation. As far as I can see, if a parent wishes to impress his views upon the child he must do so gently; that is—demand that the child should make up his own mind, but at the same time subtly impress him that in the end he will conform to his father's views in any case; though the views would never have the fanaticism they would if impressed with strength into a submissive child.

The other method is quite wrong. Children (without making them out to be angels) hate tyranny. Jung was definitely wrong when he spoke of the pleasure a child derives from being tyrannised over by those in immediate authority over him. Such a sensation in the child could hardly be else but masochistic.

Sadism and masochism are essentially corollaries of sexual desire, and such a desire, though prevalent, is but immaturely developed in a child.

As regards the prejudices a State imbues into its individuals, it is a question of great complexity. The tyranny of minority by the majority (so feared by J. S. Mill) with its somewhat nebulous corollary the totalitarian state, nevertheless occupies the main trend of the argument.

That this is an age of reason is dubious. That this is an age when culture and learning is universally admired and encouraged is even more dubious. Culture and learning are intrinsically not aggregates. Therefore before they can be applied to civilisation they necessitate the accession of an integrating force: the desire for culture and learning. Before the application of the force they are ". . . to human use unreconciled." Therefore you see, it cannot be said that we are living during a period when culture and learning (which history has shown inevitably lead to devotion to reason) are being utilised to their utmost. I speak with such cocksureness because history has also shown that periods such as those of ancient Greece, other lesser ones and that of Soviet Russia to-day, do not scatter the pages of the past with profuse abundance. Therefore I maintain that the living (though they should by no means be hindered from contemplating the present in the enlarged sense) should be most careful before expounding any definite views. I have written this preliminary to avoid unduly discussing the late war and its accessory blood-saturated world we hear so much about.

But that we here have an example of the prejudices of the State, the effects of which we are so acutely feeling, is not to be doubted. Once prejudices gain fanaticism, they become contagious. A self-hypnotic religious ecstatic saturates himself with prejudices and lays down the law in a manner worthy of both the Nazarene and Mrs. Eddy. Once he has achieved that, his fierce exhortations are believed in only too readily by ill-informed and uncritical minds (the sort of mind which, alas, is still symbolical of the mass of mankind).* It is essentially the prejudiced fanaticism which renders his outburst of verbal exuberance so contagious.

Here the similarity between the religious fanatic and the State is so close that it would falsify the sentence to call it exaggerated. The constantly repeated declaration calling to honour patriotism, and devotion to king and country, instead of reason, humanitarianism, and devotion to the people and the world, gives an abundant example of the similarity.

Once more we turn to Comte. Without doubting the soundness of his Positive philosophy, I would point that it is not positive in one important point. That is that the subordination of reason to feeling is not positive. Reason is constant, and therefore positive; feeling wavers, it rests on no firm basis: it is not immune from prejudices.

* I would call the reader's attention to the huge popularity of Spiritualism and Christian Science.

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