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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A Call to Advance

SOMEWHERE about three generations have passed since Emerson in his essay on "Self-Reliance" gave to the world a trumpet-tongued call for a complete honesty of thought and speech. To many that call came as a welcome expression of their own unexpressed feelings, and from others it enlisted at least that they at least would break the fetters of a cowardly conformity and so set the world an example of intellectual integrity which seldom fails to bring some influence. We are, in fact, all centres of either good or evil, and even though it is not always possible to trace the effects of independence, thought and speech, it is there.

This is the brighter side of the picture. But unfortunately there is another, a far less pleasing side to contemplate. One here and there is influenced, but the majority remain and seem to go on uninspired and unaffected, treading the old rounds, repeating the old shibboleths, and acting as a terrible drag upon those who would halt the development of the race. Against the individuality of the few is arrayed the coercive gregariousness of the many. As Emerson said, society is in conspiracy with itself against the manhood of its members. Society is a joint stock company in which the members agree for the better security of the bread of each shareholder. The strongest virtue is conformity. It loves not realities and creates but names and customs.

It is this tacit conspiracy of society against creative individuals that construes the really serious object before us. Against expressed dogmatism we may fight cheerfully and successfully, for in the act of expression dogmatism loses half its strength. It is the unexpressed dogmatism, the intolerance that veils itself in liberal phraseology that is to be feared. To such there is no mental strength to which one may appeal; no consciousness of mental independence that may be quickened into activity. There is only apathy and delusion, a delusion that is self-sustained by the constant repetition of the same prejudices.

The truth is that society-at-large cares little for independent thought and still less for independent speech. It reads and listens more for stimulation than for instruction. With the mass of people the common way is: "I do not agree with his opinions, and, therefore, will not listen," never thinking that this offers the best of reasons for listening. And in this organisation and perpetuation of hypocrisy the thousands of clergy are always to the front. Emerson was right when he said:—

"If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his Church. Do

I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that, with all this ostentation of examining the grounds of the institution, he will do no such thing? Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side—the permitted side, not as a man but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are the emptiest affectation."

This criticism is still more applicable to-day. With comparative mythology and Biblical criticism still in its infancy, and with only the first lisps of evolution in the air, it was possible for a much larger measure of honest belief to exist than can exist to-day. Now it is impossible to mistake the note of insincerity, evasion, and subterfuge that runs through nearly the whole of current theology. It is impossible not to feel that those preachers who say so much do not know a great deal more, and yet refrain from speech, because it would mean the sacrifice of their positions. The ministry is entered as a profession, and attacks on the prevailing theology are positively disliked. The ripe time for anyone to call a lie a lie is when he discovers it to be such, not to wait until there are enough singers to make a respectable chorus. In strict truth, every man who sees a thing to be a lie, and continues acting as though he believed it were true, is doing what he can to perpetuate its existence. Among the mass there is little or no resistance to conformity, little or no insight into the real nature of things; and for this very reason there is a greater necessity for those of clearer vision to speak out.

Of course, it will be said that society itself is chiefly responsible for the prevailing hypocrisy; and this, so far as it goes, is correct. The average individual is not so passionately enamoured of truth that he will go through fire and water in its behalf. If he can speak the truth without serious personal inconvenience, he will do so; but if to speak the truth means to be subject to innumerable petty annoyances, his sense of personal convenience will often enough triumph. In thus setting a premium upon falsehood and a tax upon truth society is to blame; but, after all, society is composed of individuals, and its reforms must start with individuals, or not at all. What is the use of complaining of the hypocrisy of society if we, by our own silence and timidity, are doing all we can to perpetuate it? Nothing can absolve each from doing all that lies in his power to secure the triumph of what he believes to be right. The higher we are in society, the greater our social standing, the more important our speech, the more extensive our influence, and the more imperative our duty. All reforms have commenced as private opinions; it is always the minority who move the world. The majority do not lead—they follow; and it is all the more important that the leadership should be in the right hands.

Let anyone sit down and seriously think over the extent of our national hypocrisy, and then say if there is not grave necessity for straightforward speech. We support a religion which preaches the nothingness of riches, while its value is summed up in terms of cash; the nation spends its best energies in the mad race for wealth, and our wars, destitute of even the empty trappings of military honour or national prestige, are but thinly-veiled covers for financial adventuring. We pour out our millions lavishly, even gleefully, upon war, and grudgingly devote a fifth part of the sum to education. We maintain a religion which teaches faith in Providence, in miracles, in prayer, and in the special inspiration of a particular set of books; and we ask vainly, Who believes in these things? Not the clergy, certainly. They are all the time evading them, telling us that they do not mean what they appear to mean, or that what they once meant they no longer mean, and that we must therefore accept them in an entirely new sense. And certainly not the laity. The average educated layman resents the plain meaning of these doctrines as an insult to his intelligence, and assures us that we are misrepresenting or caricaturing his creed. There is much lip-homage to Christianity, but little or no sincere conviction. To meet this we have to leave the circles of the educated and the cultured, and descend to the level of the Salvation Army officer or the dissenting local preacher. On all sides we find ourselves surrounded by a huge organised hypocrisy. It penetrates our lives, and vitiates our whole national existence.

Why not, then, make a clean sweep of the whole, and, now that we have let go the substance, banish the name also? Why not say what is actually the case—that we do not, as modern educated men and women, believe in tying ourselves down to the social customs and cosmical beliefs of a number of Asiatic semi-savages? Why not admit frankly that we do not believe that miracles are worked, or that prayers are actually answered; that the last word was said, even on religion, two thousand years ago, and that all our after experience is to go for nothing? We feel all this, as our actions show, and yet we lack the power to express it. We prefer to go on fooling ourselves and others, heedless of expressing it. We prefer to go on fooling ourselves and others thus perpetuating one of the greatest hypocrisies that the world has ever known. Fortunately not all are satisfied to silence. Here and there one speaks out. Here or there a man or woman determines to be themselves and to live themselves, heedless of threats and careless of consequences.

Necessarily these are few; the gregarious instinct is too strong—perhaps too important—to be easily overcome, and it is only the exceptional member of the species that can stand really alone. Yet it is to those who are strong enough to do this that we owe whatever progress is made. Progress is made by the few and enjoyed by the many. It is not those who tread the wine-press that sit at the banquet, but more often those who have stood idly looking on. The lot of the thinker has always, and necessarily, been a lonely one but, at least, in the midst of all his loneliness he has possessed the comfort that he has been true to himself, and has not shirked any of his responsibilities.

For all opinions bring responsibilities with them. No man can claim a vested or exclusive interest in his

opinions. Behind every opinion stretches a long history; if we could only trace its many stages, the individual who expresses it is only the final term in the process. It took countless generations to create a Shakespeare, and when he came he belonged to the race. It was humanity seeing itself under one of its most favourable forms. Unbelief has thus its responsibilities no less than has belief. If the believer holds that he is bound to express his opinions and secure assent, the unbeliever should also feel that his duty to himself and his belief is as great. There is no moral reason why an unbeliever should go through life with his lips closed and his voice hushed lest it should hurt the feelings of a believer. There is nothing noble in believing a lie because it is ancient. Opinion is after all the most powerful cause in effecting development, and he is ultimately helping his kind most who fights most strenuously against all falsehood and all shams. It is the way for a wiser and nobler people than we have yet gained.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### THE CENTENARY OF ANNIE BESANT

EXACTLY how much of the "occult" or the "esoteric" was known by Mrs. Besant before she came across Madame H. P. Blavatsky's "Secret Doctrine," I do not know; but she must have read at least something about the "mystery" religions, for she refers to them quite a lot in her pamphlet, "Roots of Christianity." But there can be no doubt that by the time—in 1889—the late W. T. Stead asked her to review "H.P.B.'s" *Magnum Opus*, she was beginning to get more or less dissatisfied with Materialism, Atheism, and even Socialism. She wanted to explore unknown territories, and in these huge volumes she undoubtedly saw what she was looking for—the Mysteries, the weird and wonderful, the key to Evolution and Race, the Marvellous Masters with their Message, the esoteric and occult explanation of the Meaning of the Universe. Overboard at one fell swoop went the sane thinking which had—at least in a measure—characterised the mind of Mrs. Besant, and she was ready to swallow any hocus-pocus theory so long as its true meaning was shrouded in a plethora of words and words, and this particularly if the key words were in Sanscrit or Hindustani.

It is much more romantic and "occult" to say *chela* rather than student and learnedly to talk about *vedānta*, *yuga*, *vādyā*, *Mahātmā*, *Nirmānakāya*, *ātma*, *ālaya*, and was bound to impress many *chelas* who might have found the English equivalents of these words more or less nonsense.

But by the time she had gone through the "Secret Doctrine" Mrs. Besant was ready to believe anything—though perhaps it is only fair to add that she obviously and quite sincerely thought she could combine her Atheism, Materialism, Malthusianism, and Socialism, with her Theosophy, and still be a shining light on the platform of the National Secular Society.

She got two rude shocks. One was from her greatest friend, Charles Bradlaugh, who said in the "National Reformer": "I look to possible developments of her Theosophic views with the very gravest misgiving." And the other was from G. W. Foote who, in his "Mrs. Besant's Theosophy," one of his most vigorous and outspoken pamphlets, made an analysis of her views which stung her to the quick, and she replied in "Why I Became a Theosophist"—in my opinion, a wordy and very poor defence.

But the die was cast, and thenceforth it was as a Theosophist she was to be known. When she went to see Mme. Blavatsky, it did not take long for that very experienced campaigner to convince her that nobody had been more unjustly maligned

than poor Mme. Blavatsky (also known among her intimates as "H.P.B. ").

In some ways, I must admit a sincere admiration for the old—though not so old, perhaps, as she died at 60—lady. She managed to get a large number of quite clever people to believe in her and her claims, and there is no doubt that as soon as she found the old spiritualist game unprofitable, she worked very hard to master the more fashionable "occultism." Books like the "Veil of Isis" and the "Secret Doctrine" are not easily written—whatever we may think of their contents. That they owe much to the vast literature of the esoteric, the works written by many famous men, is, of course, true; but it required something like genius to be able to exploit superstition and credulity as Mme. Blavatsky managed to do. She died quite unexpectedly and suddenly, and Mrs. Besant proposed immediately to step into her shoes. The climax was most intriguing.

One of "H.P.B.'s" trump cards was the number of letters she was always getting from the Masters or Mahatmas in Tibet—they were not sent by post, but were "precipitated" through the air by methods only known to the wise old adepts. These letters were full of directions on how to run the Theosophical Society—Mme. Blavatsky being the leading guide, so to speak, working entirely under the Masters. And in 1891, Mrs. Besant appeared for the last time on the platform of the N.S.S., and said:—

"You have known me in this hall for sixteen and a-half years. You have never known me to tell a lie. ('No, never,' and loud cheers.) I tell you that since Madame Blavatsky left I have had letters in the same handwriting as the letters which she received. (Sensation.) Unless you think dead persons can write, surely that is a remarkable fact. You are surprised; I do not ask you to believe me; but I tell you that it is so. . . ."

And so on.

I expect that not many members of our Society are left who heard Mrs. Besant on that fatal night, but some of those who were have told me of the sorrow and heart-rending her defection caused among the people who had known and loved her for over fifteen years.

She repeated her belief that the letters she had received were really "precipitated" from Tibet in a subsequent interview with the press, and refused to say how—"The Mahatmas," she firmly declared, "only communicate with pupils who will not unwisely divulge anything." Alas, neither the members of the N.S.S. nor the hard-headed press were convinced.

To cut a very long story short, it transpired later that the Mahatma letters were actually written by William Q. Judge, the Vice-President of the Society, and the somewhat chastened and crestfallen Mrs. Besant had to admit as much in public. She did not, of course, charge Mr. Judge with unblushing "forgery"—that would have been a sad blow to the Society; but she was obliged to add, "I now know they (the letters) were not written or precipitated by the Master, and that they were done by Mr. Judge." But it would have required far more courage than even Mrs. Besant possessed to go once again before the N.S.S. and admit that she had been quite mistaken, and that the horrid old septsies in the Freethought Movement, like the man who had always seen through her, G. W. Foote, were after all quite right.

All this and much more should have silenced her and even her Theosophy—but she was not in the least cowed or shaken. And there are few more fascinating chapters in the history of any Society than those in which Mrs. Besant managed eventually to become President of the Theosophical Society—or rather part of it. The rows and squabbles which characterised early Christian history—according to Acts—are as nothing to those which convulsed the various cliques for and against her; but she carried imperturbably on. Even when Mrs. Tingley broke off to "boss" her own section in California, and she had to

bear the brunt of "Bishop" Leadbeater's excursions into sex, as well as the fiasco of the reincarnated Messiah, Krishnanurti (who appears to have always protested that he wasn't the Messiah, reincarnated or not), Mrs. Besant carried on. Her silvery voice, her torrent of words, and her marvellous confidence, never left her and duly impressed the faithful.

When the Malthusian League celebrated its 50th anniversary, she was invited as the honoured guest. She immediately insisted that no one was to smoke while she was there and everybody rather sheepishly agreed not to; and then once again came the old confident flow of words (and I must admit that for an old lady of eighty to talk like that, forced even my admiration), but the old spell did not quite succeed. For Mrs. Besant had given up by then almost everything which, when she was young and vigorous in mind she had stood for, and it was a sad wreck which remained.

And when she died in 1933 she was almost forgotten. Yet it is only fair to remember her past glories during those splendid fighting years with Charles Bradlaugh—alas, now only a matter of history.

Perhaps the one quality which will linger in its pages is, as George Bernard Shaw insists—Annie Besant was the greatest of all woman platform speakers.

H. CUTNER.

## A BRIEF CASE

A JOLLY good job it was a brief case too. To think that those common British Customs Officers should have completely disregarded the holy-flowing black robes and bewitching white headgear of both the Reverend Mother Bernadette of Our Lady's High School, West Hill, Dartford, Kent; and Johanna Vlaming, otherwise the Reverend Mother Dorothea, of St. Philomena's, Chelsfield Road, St. Mary Cray, Kent. And in their wicked unbelief did cast suspicion upon our Mother Superiors when they arrived at Liverpool by air and commonly charged them with smuggling a pipe and ties, and, etc., for the purpose of evading customs duty and purchase tax.

I'm very glad to think they were both represented by defending counsel and the sorry case was will-o-the-wisped in and out of that horrible court with the speed of light.

Why on earth defending counsel did not point out to the magistrate that the good women of Ireland have been known to smoke pipes as well as spit like navvies, I don't know. But this one article alone, though concealed beneath superior robes like the Apocrypha, could have been claimed that it had not been used and shared in a soothing smoke as intended, solely because of the strange feeling that flying about in a scientific manner caused.

As for the ties mentioned in the charge sheet, I would have suggested that loud ties are not, and never were, a part of holy habits, and that it was more than likely the work of international sleight-of-hands who plied their shameful calling upon these innocent Mother Superiors for the base purpose of supplying spivs who rejoice in wearing such colourful neckerchiefs. I only hope some kind soul came forward to pay the £100 fine with twenty guineas costs that was imposed.

How do mere magistrates expect these mothers of poverty to carry such mammon or treasure is beyond my understanding; and the hurtful remark made that in the event of this phenomenal sum not reaching the court's till, it would open the gates that led to cells somewhat different to the confessionals they were more acquainted with, and wherein they would have two months in point of time in which the real culprits responsible for having stealthily placed such offensive articles in their baggage and habit folds may be traced.

I promise to do all in my power to hush up this sordid affair where undeniable Superiority is concerned, and that I may be instrumental in bringing whoever it was who did it to justice, if only for their children's sake.

TIMOTHY THOMAS.

## ACID DROPS

We were very pleased to see the "Manchester Guardian" for October 18, bringing to the front the fine work of Norman Angell in connection with national problems following a war. Before the First World War, and after Norman Angell was well in the public eye, and when the war was ceasing Angell was not slow in putting before the public the truth to the victors as well as losers. Substantially he laid bare the foolishness that any nation can really keep another in irons without paying very heavily for the pastime. Thomas Paine saw it a hundred and fifty years ago. In some way or another we have been ignoring the truth of that teaching. We are now seeing the same thing to which the people and our leaders pay but little attention. If the offending nations deserve punishment, well and good, but we must be prepared to pay the bill. The Allies have thrashed Germany. Well and good. It had to be done. But now if the Allies are for peace and profit, we must set about reinstating the German people in a way that will secure justice all round.

Those who are interested—honestly interested—in what we have said concerning Norman Angell might consult his "The Great Illusion," "The Economics of Peace," and "Preface to Peace." There are more, but these will do. The dates of the books are, 1910, 1919, and 1920. There are others, but they are enough. But don't be too hard on our professional politicians. They are learning very slowly, but they are learning. Even Churchill fell back on Thomas Paine without acknowledgment true, but it was good for a politician.

There is a simple aspect of Catholic manoeuvring that is worth noting. Some time ago a Member of Parliament gave us the reading of a book he had compiled showing the number of posts in different parts of the world, either owned or under the control of England, that were controlled by Roman Catholics. It was a revelation. It was also a warning to remember that the Catholic Church has never failed to use any weapon that increased the power of the Church. It was Lord Acton, one of the most respected historians we have had, who said plainly that if a man "accepts the Papacy with confidence, obedience and admiration he must have made terms with murder." We have to but raise our eyes to see 14 large volumes written by Professor H. C. Lea, large in size and deadly in their accuracy. Lord Acton was not alone in so valuating the Papacy. But they are deadly enough without inviting other evidences. The Church boasts that it is the same through the whole of time. That is so, but it should not boast about it. It creates a desire for knowledge.

It is astonishing that those who know better should go "flop" when sentiment is in play. For example. Our papers have been advertising for some time the Princess Elizabeth. The reason for this is not difficult to understand, and it may be made public soon. Elizabeth is the next one to the throne, and that explains so much advertisement. But there was no need for a writer in the "Daily Express" to advertise his shortcomings by saying that because "religious" marriage is in the Prayer Book, that makes it legal.

But the Prayer Book has no legal connection whatever with the legal marriage. Any legal connection was wiped out long, long ago. The sole condition for a marriage—from the Crown to a mere "person"—the only legal marriage in England, is that connected with a person licensed to marriage. That being done, any couple can stand on their heads and have any religion they prefer. But the State has no connection between marriage and religion. The place must be licensed for the marriage, the registrar must be licensed by the State, and the place must be licensed also. It is curious to some, but the fact remains. A parson has to carry his secular licence before he can give a legal licence that a couple are married. Every layman should know that. Every parson knows it, but not many publish it.

It may be remembered that a little time back a man and woman had, quite innocently, found that their marriage was invalid. They had been "married" by a priest who lacked a licence. This left the mother and father and two children in a difficult situation. The situation was so pitiful that the House of Commons by an Act of Law, and the innocence of the parties concerned, decided to consider the performance that had taken place as legitimate and legal.

While we are jotting down these items we may call attention to the pleasing news that our Princess, for her wedding hymn, chooses "The Lord is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Want." That must be a very cheerful item of news. We are not sure about "The Lord," but we think that some notice should be given to the Houses of Parliament who are also giving a *mité* to protect the Princess from starvation. More so, our Government are so anxious to prevent the King and Queen from receiving money to give to the poor without saying whether it is all given or not.

And coming to another problem we may call attention to one important thing. From various places there comes the news that Russia has no desire to go to war. We can quite believe that. It is also true that neither England or America, or any other country wishes to go to war. Hitler had no desire to go to war. Generally speaking, nations do not wish to go to war. All each one desires is to have things arranged as he or they wish for; and if that were forthcoming there would be no war at any time. But each one simply cannot get all he wants, because then "honour" is broken or something else occurs. We believe that none of the nations want war. What each one wants is to get things just as he or she wishes to have. Words are terrible things for misleading.

A correspondent to the "Church Times" obviously does not like the prospects of poor heating this winter in churches so he suggests coming to the problem from a different angle—"There is no flame like the flame of enthusiasm for warming both body and soul"; so he advises singing plenty of the old "soul-stirring hymns" which would radiate "a vivid enthusiasm" from stall to pulpit. That may be so, but even hymn singing won't radiate heat, and there's nothing like an icy cold church for damping any religious spirit. We have an idea that our Lord himself would have found freezing in a country church both desponding and discouraging. It's the B.B.C. which will score here, for even the dulllest service will pass quickly before a roaring coal fire.

Sensible men and women are not looking for miracles, and are very doubtful of them when they arrive. Sensible men and women are not looking for miracles—even when the first baby arrives. Moreover, it may happen that the child is not so courageous as the parent, or the parent may not be strong enough to face the unpleasantness that in small centres opposition to such things as religion does not make for comfort. In school life the boy, or the girl, may also shrink from Atheism, and not because they dislike Atheism, but because they lack the courage to face unpleasant consequences during school life. Children soon find out that swimming against the stream is not always a pleasant way to spend one's time.

In these days of hectic discussion as to whether skirts should or should not be lengthened, it must prove interesting to note that the Catholic hierarchy have already settled the matter. In the tract entitled "The Catholic Woman's Apostate" with the imprimatur of Cardinal Mundelein, we are severely told that "the clothing of women should be of such quality and quantity as to conceal rather than reveal the form and the person of the wearer. . . neither style, comfort, health, sport or art is an excuse for immodesty. . . wear dresses of such length that when sitting they will be long enough that the skirt falls four inches below the knees and the neck of the dress high all around. . ." Obviously Catholic women to whom these injunctions are religiously addressed must have been naughty—or perhaps the Cardinal and his fellow writers were suffering very badly from sex inhibitions?

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**SUGAR PLUMS**

It is rather interesting to hear our "spiritual" guides complaining at the moral decline of the people. Added to the lot there comes the Bishop of Derby, lamenting the "moral decline of the people." Some amount of "moral decline" of the people is always on hand, and our spiritual masters have stood it very well. In fact, we do not know what the clergy would do if there was not some degree of "badness" among the people. So long as the evil among people does not reach above a certain degree the clergy are quite happy, for some degree of badness is essential if Christianity is to flourish. Without the Christian doctrine of the fall of man, there would be no use for Jesus, there would be no talk of hell. In fact, the clergy would lose their authority and their status.

But the world war has led, quite naturally, to a degree of dishonesty, brutality, etc., such as the world has seldom experienced. Robbery has reached its greatest level, and if things continue, the next stage will witness bodies of armed robbers—and worse—with the ruling people unable to check the development mentioned. But there is one body of people who are almost floating over the state of things. That is the clergy. Day after day one finds them declaiming the "moral decline" that has taken place. But an upsetting of civic life follows every war, and the dislocation in quality is determined by the length of the war and the ferocity of the people.

That is the A.B.C. of the whole-situation. If our clergy had possessed a real degree of social understanding they would have recognised the truth of what we have said. We are now paying the price of war, and our political and religious leaders are of little real use in the situation. In all the wars that the civilised world has known the Churches have never striven to evade the moral of war as an instrument of peace, or even of securing general peacefulness on which some reasonable peace could be effected. Wealth on the one side and the Church on the other have been mainly concerned with their own security. None has the courage to say that real peace cannot be secured by more and more deadly arms piled up. Weapons mean war, and war means weapons. There might have been plenty of wars if Christianity had never existed. That is true, but it is also true that it could have been in a worse position. In all history there has never been a collection of churches that can be said to have created peace. Their play and their duty was to call God to strengthen their guns, and afterwards thank God because there were some left to keep the churches going.

Every Christian passes through a costly process before he is called "safe." In spite of all their eagerness, bribes, and threats to bring humans into the pen, it costs a lot to be a Christian. Whether the purchase is a bargain it is not

for us to say at this point. Consider also that everywhere more parsons are hunting for children than there are children hunting for parsons.

Moreover, children are not left alone—religiously. In infancy, in adolescence and maturity, gigantic efforts are made to perpetuate religion and its doctrines. Those who profess are rewarded; those who do not are often subject to trouble; and it must be noted that with all efforts the numbers of believers are shrinking, shrinking, and yet again shrinking. The Church gains its triumphs by bribery; it would lose them by sheer honesty. The attacks on people by Christians are so insistent that it is surprising anyone escapes, but give us a fair field and in a generation or two it would be difficult to find Christians littering the roadways. Or let Christians have their education for the young free from coercion, and then see how many would be left going to Church in a few generations.

There is one other point that is worth some notice. Christians, particularly, write and talk as though people become such by the influence of some unknown mysterious force, and the churches have just to write the names of the newcomers and the trick is done. That also is nonsense, and the very worst kind of nonsense—religious nonsense. If it takes a long while to turn out an Atheist, it is equally true that it is very hard to get a plain Christian, and often very difficult to hold him. Actually it is harder to retain a Christian than it is to hold on to an Atheist. The lies of religion go straight to the church.

**A DATE WITH DEATH!**

GET out your incubators—the breeding season is now in full swing! Prams are at a premium and the pavements are congested with expectant mothers proudly displaying their protuberant paunches, with a cigarette drooping from their painted lips.

These are the pampered pets of Peace—the Legionnaires of Love and Extra Rations—nobly extending their middle-fronts for Coupons, King and Country. Make way for the Nation's hope and the Church's glory!

We are told that more babies are being born in this year of disgrace than in any other year since 1920—which also was two years after a Great War. *Who* said wars were a useless and senseless institution? What a grand excuse they provide for Church and State to raise their banners high and scream—"Mothers—we need you! People our land or perish! Build better babies for Britain!" etc., etc.

Oh yes, we have heard it all before, but it comes out again like an old garment from its moth-balled lair after every world-upheaval. Somehow it never occurs to anyone that it is precisely this mad scramble for begetting humans that must inevitably lead to War. Nations having no room in which to expand are forced to encroach on the private preserves of their neighbours. Countries unable to sustain their increased populations must seek whom they may devour and whose mineral and industrial wealth they may steal by force of arms. No, bless their dear innocent souls, that would never occur to the leaders of any Church or State.

Always we must first think of Posterity. We must plan for the future generations and ensure that by our dying, our suffering and sacrifices, our dear, dear children and grand-children shall inherit the earth and the fruits thereof. Never for one moment must we think of ourselves, of our own needs and comforts; obviously it is only for the privilege of providing juicy plums for our descendants that we are permitted to live at all. It is our duty to starve willingly and gladly so that the bellies of our progeny may never rattle like our own!

Yet all this might be quite noble and worth while if only we could be assured that our sacrifices would not be in vain.

But what does history prove? Something quite to the contrary. The hordes of squalling humanity we are urged to produce are merely so much food and fuel for future outbursts of savagery and hate. In other words we are sadistically fattening-up infants for the slaughter, providing human targets for the bombs and guns. *We are making a future date with Death!*

Surely, then, no right-minded, right-thinking person would bring into this already over-crowded and suffering world new progeny merely to satisfy the greed and avarice of future statesmen. Have we any sort of assurance that other Hitlers, other war-lords and selfish armament-kings will not arise to plunge the world once more into a blood-bath of wholesale torture and mass murder? What has happened before can obviously happen again.

Ah—you will say—but we have now learned our lesson. Never again! *That, too, was said in 1918.* Oh yes, but what about our United Nations Organisation? Surely that will guarantee us peace for all time? *Have we forgotten there was once a League of Nations, too?* Even now, the same old bickering and squabbling, the same dry-rot of enmity and distrust has set in and the inevitable result is all too plainly foreseen by those who are not wilfully blind or mentally deficient.

The sad truth is that human nature has never changed since the first stone-age man threw the first stone at his brother because he happened to be the stronger of the two. Civilisation is but a thin veneer disguising our primitive and animal urges and it is torn into shreds like tissue paper in the first political breeze that blows.

One has but to observe the multitudes of over-sexed females and under-sexed males who frantically applaud dressed-up negroes dirging sentimental absurdities for fabulous sums of money or hysterically fighting like wild beasts to see a Hollywood Glamour Girl to realise just how much this vaunted Civilisation is worth. While Intellectuals are openly ridiculed and all brain-workers are absurdly rewarded, the unintelligent masses are grossly overpaid for doing as little as they possibly can and are for ever holding-up the country to ransom for still higher wages and still fewer hours of labour. The wretched Thinker may starve and the poor Inventor is always easy prey and fair game for the unscrupulous Business Man who robs him of the fruits of his genius and misapplies them for purposes of destruction. The aeroplane and the harnessing of atomic energy are outstanding proofs of this. Science is sacrificed on the Altar of Mars!

How transparent then are the frothy vapourings of our politicians who eternally promise us Utopia in return for our votes—and yet somehow they succeed in fooling us every time! How futile to hope for any sort of peace or happiness in a world that regards the decent feelings of tenderness and humility as conclusive evidence of a decadent weakness! Flag-wagging, bugle-blowing, martial pomp and ceremony and all the patriotic palaver of armed might are deeply instilled into our children from the nursery until they are old enough to be ordered on to the battlefield to die for Freedom.

Freedom, indeed! Where is there any freedom in the world to-day? We are more enslaved than we have ever been. Dictatorships are springing up on every hand. Our daily lives are ordered and controlled from birth till death and State-worship has become a fetish. The individual no longer matters; he is a pawn, a plaything of politicians to be directed as the State decides. *That is the Liberty and Freedom we were told to die for—and this is the Fool's Paradise we have to live in!*

Must we thoughtlessly condemn those yet unborn to such a barren and hopeless existence? Or shall we be honest and say—"Enough! If Life holds nothing more than this it were better never to have lived at all. But, being born, at least we will not bring others into this world of misery and woe!" This should be the vow of every decent man and woman. Heed not the unctuous cries of Church and State bidding you be fruitful and multiply—for theirs are siren voices and the honey on

their lips will turn to deadly poison. *Your sons will assuredly die even as other sons have died—for a worthless slogan!*

Then is there *nothing* we can do to end this sorry plight? Is there *no* ray of light or hope for suffering humanity? If life is but a dreary span of drudgery, a ceaseless struggle against hunger and want might we not, with considerable advantage, have remained deep in the darkest jungle, swinging from tree to tree by our prehensile tails? At least we would have been free from the overburdening cares and the rottenness, beastliness and all the smug hypocrisy of modern civilisation.

But yes—there is a trail leading out into the sunlight; though it is densely overgrown by those giant evil-smelling weeds—the barriers of Race, Creed and Colour. Once we remove those barriers there remains no single cause for any man to despise or hate his brother. That surely must mean the end of all War. But how are those obstacles to be removed? We venture to suggest a not impossible method, if only we have the courage to carry it out.

First, we must cease to be mere cringing creatures of fear and superstition pandering to political and ecclesiastical dictators and eagerly lapping up the sop they offer us. We must have *faith in ourselves* to overcome all difficulties.

Secondly, Man must learn to realise that his own country is *not* supreme; his own race is *not* superior and his own creed is *not* necessarily the only right and true one. He must put Internationalism before Nationalism and cultivate tolerance and a broad understanding of his fellow men; appreciating *their views, their problems and their ways of living.*

Thirdly, we must for all time banish the false gods of Fear, Greed and Selfishness internationally and individually. Only when we learn to see clearly through the eyes of Reason instead of blindly through the mist and fog of faded tradition and superstition—only when each man learns *to think for himself*—will there be any hope for the world or for that Posterity we are told to breed for!

W. H. WOOD.

## WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

Public Conference in Birmingham, October 24-26

THE Conference opened on Friday evening with a reception of members and friends of the constituent bodies, in the Society of Artists Gallery. It was a happy beginning with introductions, conversations, musical items, refreshments, and speeches from Messrs. G. Bunn, H. J. Truman and H. J. Blackham. The panel of speakers covering the business sessions, which opened on Saturday and terminated on Sunday afternoon, consisted of Prof. P. Sargant Florence, Archibald Robertson, Avro Marmatten, Charles Duff, Chapman Cohen, Elsa Barea, C. B. Bonner, J. Katz and H. J. Blackham. Subjects dealt with were "The Secular Basis of Morality," "The World Policy of the Church of Rome," "Where Rome Rules" and "The Humanist Contribution to Civilisation." All will agree that the speeches were excellent in matter, manner and variety, that they covered a wide field of historic factors and sociological influences, and exposed a definite threat to human rights and freedom by the Vatican's interference in world politics. Questions and discussions followed and the different points of view expressed by members of the audience and the speakers' replies added further interest to the whole proceedings.

Mr. Chapman Cohen received a particularly warm welcome when he rose, as chairman, to open the Saturday evening session. He is well known to Birmingham Freethinkers, and his speech closing the meeting was full of fire, wit and sense, and sent those present home on a note of enthusiasm and hope.

Audiences were good all through and increased as the conference developed, many making long journeys to be present.

At the Sunday morning session the two following resolutions were passed without dissent:—

"This meeting protests to the Italian Government at the oppressive action taken against Italian Freethinkers and anti-clericals and urges it to annul the penalties imposed on the editors, publishers, and printers of Freethought and anti-clerical periodicals."

"This meeting expresses its sympathy and admiration for those Spaniards who continue to struggle for freedom of thought and its expression, and deploras the continuance of the present oppressive retrograde regime."

They will be sent to the respective Governments.

A word of praise must be given to the local committee who carried out the arrangements so thoroughly and well. Only those with the good fortune to give voluntary services in making arrangements for a Freethought conference can realise the work that has to go on behind the scenes. The friendly spirit in which the local team worked may be gathered from the readiness with which his colleagues gave the laurels to the secretary, Mr. G. Bunn. Their efforts laid the foundations for an excellent and instructive conference. R.H.R.

CORRESPONDENCE

KROPOTKIN AND RUSSIA

Sir,—Your correspondent Mr. Jones on Prince Kropotkin and Anarchism in Russia, writes as though the anarchists had no attitude to the Russian Revolution and that their fate, for good or ill, arose out of a vacuum. This is, of course, nonsense.

The anarchist movement in Russia really split ultimately into three groups. One took no part in politics and therefore lived quietly and without any influence on public affairs. The second group lined up with the Communists and many of its members joined the Bolshevik Party, while a third group opposed the revolution.

The extreme form of this latter group is the one which is mentioned by your correspondent as the Anarchist Mackhnoist movement.

This is the group which was very strongly opposed by the Soviet Government and for very good reasons. Mackhno was a Ukrainian who led armed bands which, while they began by opposing the forces of Skoropadsky in the South of the Ukraine, ended by becoming little more than robbers and bandits. Mackhno refused to join his detachments with the Red Army and became increasingly involved in banditry. Mackhno himself fled across the Rumania border leaving his followers behind. The reputation he has left in the Ukraine is an unsavoury one.

The suggestion that in clearing up this situation, as it had to do if any order was to prevail at all, the Soviet Government was acting wrongly or unjustly is to discredit the Anarchist movement.—Yours, etc., STANLEY EVANS.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square)—Tuesday, November 4, 7 p.m.: "The Significance of Psychical Research," Mr. G. N. M. TYRRELL.

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square)—Wednesday, November 5, 7 p.m.: "Aspects of Evolution"—5th Lecture: "The Influence of Environment on Evolution," Dr. M. BURTON, D.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square)—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Mystery of Francis Bacon," Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edware Road)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Some Thoughts on the Role of Religion in Society," Mr. P. SLOANE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Stret)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. G. L. GREAVES, A. SAMMS.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Morals and Politics," Mr. J. M. CAMERON, M.A. (Bradford).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, 270, Sauchiehall Street)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Freethought in a Progressive Society," Councillor VICTOR WARREN.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Psychology and Religion," Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Bible and the Churches," Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Freethought in a Changing World," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROMPITSON, M.A. (Author of "The Bible and its Background").

Nottingham Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street)—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "War in the Minds of Men," Mr. J. HALL TOD (U.N.A.).

"Conchies"—1914-1945.—A Dinner and Reunion is being arranged at Regiorri's Restaurant (opp. King's Cross Stn.) on December 6th. Applications for tickets (7s. 6d.) to Rex Whittaker, 76 Mount Nod Road, S.W. 16 should include name of the Prison.

LONELY?—Join Friendship Circle. Details 6d. Secretary, 34, Honeywell Road, London, S.W. 11.

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BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL. By Chapman Cohen. An Appreciation of two great Reformers. Price 3s.; postage 3½d.

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## WHAT HAS PRESBYTERIANISM DONE FOR SCOTLAND ?

### III.

THE Scottish race are as a whole musically inclined, yet I can in no other way account for the lack of great musicians and composers amongst them than to the influence of the Church. I well recall the dissension that was caused by the introduction of the organ into some of the Churches; splitting many of them in two, and was termed "worshipping God with machinery." A Procentor with a pitch-fork was considered by thousands to meet all requirements. Seventy years ago a piano in the home of a working man was a rarity. The Kirk had always been jealous of anything that had the slightest tendency to lessen the solemnity of their religion. The Psalms of David were its ideals; and bagpipes were of a less competitive nature than an orchestra or band music.

Scotland gave to the world its greatest song writer in Robert Burns. Four of his songs were enough to have made him famous: "Scots Wha Hae," the greatest of all the national anthems; "John Anderson my Jo," is outstanding as a golden wedding tribute; "Bonnie Jean," the greatest tribute mortal man ever paid to a woman; and "Auld Lang Syne," the world's closing ode. He left the material for two comic operas in "The Jolly Beggars" and "Tam O'Shanter," but the musical composer and director never appeared to put them into effect. And had they done so "The Kirk" would have seen to it that they never had an opening. Allan Ramsay experienced its wrath when after he had given Edinburgh its first theatre, he was denied a permit to open it.

The Auld Scotch Sangs are still the greatest collection of any country's folk songs; Harry Lauder added nothing to them of poetic value, but was a success in his ability to render a hotch-potch jazz in a jazz age.

For hundreds of years Scotland was kept singing Psalms and playing on bagpipes while her musical education was being neglected. It still has no opera, and has produced no great singer; neither has it any drama, and has produced no outstanding dramatist. Its best actor was Walter Bently, son of a minister. Its band music is inferior to that of many other countries. It is only in recent years that band music was allowed on Sunday in the public parks, and had to be started by the rendering for the most part of sacred music, with a collection for charitable purposes.

In architecture Presbyterianism has erected no structures to compare with the beautiful abbeys of the past, which even in their ruin command the admiration of Protestantism. In this respect Scotland gained nothing by the Reformation; in architecture its churches are but poor examples compared to those of the past.

Scotland has dealt so long in heights and depths that it has failed to produce a scientist of outstanding note. While it is a part of a revolving globe, one might almost suspect that the idea still prevailed that we were living upon a flat earth.

In painting and sculpture, false modesty still demands that but little of the human form be exposed. God is said to have made man in his own image. Yet in Scotland such must be properly draped.

The absence of the Scottish voice from the radio is quite noticeable, and when it does come over the air the contrast is pronounced in either the spoken voice or in song, to be readily detected. A well modulated voice is a requisite to a successful announcer. There is a certain musical tone in the English voice to make it acceptable even with its "Ye-ahs and ye-ahs," in preference to the Scotch "Yeers and yeers." Yes, Scotland needs lessons in voice culture. Likewise a new set of teeth, before becoming an acceptable platform speaker. The educated American is by far the superior of the Britisher on stage or platform in proper pronunciation.

I cannot help deploring these contrasts in other nationalities with those of the land of my birth, and what seems to me as the causes which lead up to them. I love to listen to the wonderful symphonies, to the grand operas, and the beautiful harmonies, to the Shakespearian plays, and the modulated voices of the actors, in all of which Scotland plays a minor part, and how proud I would feel could I claim a greater part in these arts for Scotland.

The quarterly reports of crime there are for the most part of a trifling character. It comes natural for the people there to respect the law: it has been handed down to them from one generation to another; doors are locked at night from force of habit. The country has always been strong for Compulsory Education, and educated people are as a rule less criminally inclined. In America we have a population from all parts of the world. The names connected with crime often betray their nationality. The Scotch are conspicuous by their absence there or in prison. As a law-abiding people we will compare favourably with any other nationality; they have inherited their good morality for ages. Yet morality has nothing to do with religion, though many are of the opinion that there can be no morality without religion, and thus conflict the two as being one.

Religion is founded upon belief in a hereafter, a bribe to its followers for being good here in order to win a reward. Morality pertains to the here and now by doing right from love of right, from knowledge, from reading and investigation. Therefore it is not essential that we should attend Church for the purpose of being reminded that we are guilty sinners, and in danger of losing a harp and a pair of wings in a heaven that neither the Telescope nor the modern Airplane has found the slightest trace of. I think it was Martin Luther who said that all our good deeds done here were as filthy rags unless done in the name of Jesus Christ. John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian Church, was instrumental in having Michael Servetus burned at the stake for a difference of opinions. John Knox, father of the Reformation, posed as a dictator in both civil and religious liberty, by harassing the life of Queen Mary, and seeking to place himself above her in authority. Both of these men never hesitated to persecute for opinion's sake. Many to-day would do the same if they had the power.

The coming of Knox was all but a death blow to whatever art Scotland possessed, and the fact of her not occupying more of the front page to-day is largely due to this one man. His ghost still stalks the streets of Edinburgh on Sunday where everything is closed, but the churches, museums, libraries, theatres, halls, restaurants, all must put on their shutters or pull down their blinds because this man willed it so ages ago, compelling the people of to-day to be still living in the past.

In every town are to be seen miles of streets of colourless stone houses, totally lacking in architectural feature or beauty, betraying a poverty of design, all adding a sombre hue to the scene, even the lead sky adds a solemnity to the picture of Sunday in Scotland.

"Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."—Ecclesiastes, vii. 3.

What a wonderful picture of Scotch Presbyterianism when lived up to.  
—ROBERT HOWDEN.

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