

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVII.—No. 50

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### Religion and Death

EARLY in the world war there were two incidents worthy of notice. The first was that of a man found dying for two days and was past recovery. His companion was a pocket edition of Ruskin's "Crown of Wild Olives." When found the dying man asked for one thing, that the book should be buried with him. It had comforted him. In the same area there was another man, also dying, but his request was for a priest to be with him. There was a notable difference in the two cases. In the first case a book written by a man who was one of England's masters of letters. With the other case just a priest and a dying man. The differences were great, and yet there was something in common of the two simple, but solemn events. Two dying men, one finding all he wanted in a beautiful book, the other enraptured with crude superstition. But a likeness for those who can read the situation correctly.

The Freethinker notes and covers both cases, and in his philosophy finds room and understanding for both. He will see the degree to which the two cases connect, and that despite differences there are connections. Delusion, yes, but delusion may be as comforting as a physical reality, provided something is taken as well as given. The first a soldier, with his "Crown of Wild Olives," dying; the second with his request for a priest, yet the request for a priest does not prove there is truth in religion. The consolation of religion merely proves use and custom. They may both prove the power of beauty and the consolation that comes with it. What greater comfort could the finest literature ever produced, bring to a man who died holding a book to which he owed much? And with what appreciation could a dying man feel better than expressing his conviction to a particular priest? Comfort followed conviction. The question of the social or intellectual value does not arise. That is a distinct question.

Naturally, the clergy of all denominations make the most of such incidents. Because the dying man wishes some foolish process shall go on, is that sufficient to deny a dying man a few moments of nonsense? I think not. People forget there are situations where truth is brutal, where truth is not warrantable. Moreover, the value of a thing may be exhibited by its situation. The value of whisky as an article of food is not to be tested in that manner. The drunkard confounds the non-drinker; the non-drinker replies in the same way. In the same way, it is not the religious man who presents the "Freethinker" as a guide for life. The Freethinker is not puzzled by the man who demands religious services and says that he cannot get on without them. It is the religionist who is confounded by the Freethinker getting on quite comfortably without religious teachings, living a useful and upright life, and meeting death calmly and with dignity. Other things equal, one man with-

out religion is of greater evidence than a thousand with it. The thousand prove at most that human nature can get on with religion. The one man proves that human nature can get on without it. It removes religion from a necessity to a luxury—or a dissipation.

In these days death is one of the most familiar facts. In many cases it means the death of a relative or friend, killed in the full flush of manhood. In all cases it confronts us with some catastrophe. Our period of "peace" gives promises to further dangers. In some degree they are more aggravating than open war. Familiarity with evil things has dulled the edges of our sensibilities. Religious leaders are manoeuvring to place religion in a stronger position. The Churches are trying to make the best they can in a position that threatens their downfall. In the presence of death there is not much difference between Atheist and Godite. One well-known writer says:—

"It is indeed quite possible for people who are Agnostic or unbelievers with regard to immortality to give themselves wholly to the pursuit of truth, and to the service of our fellow men in moral earnestness and heroic endeavour. They may endure pain and sorrow and with calm resignation toil on in patience and perseverance. The best of the ancient Stoics did so, and many a man, a modern Agnostic, is doing it to-day."

The significance of the confession is in no wise diminished by the qualification that this class of people are missing a joy which would have been to them a wellspring of courage and strength is pure assumption, perhaps impudence. Those who are without religion are not conscious of any lack of courage or strength. Certainly their outward appearance does not show it. The behaviour of Atheists is at least displaying as much wisdom and courage as others. The time is passed when the Atheist can be placed with men and women who are low in wit and wisdom.

We come back to the matter from which we started. Experience proves that there are a hundred and one things for which men and women will face almost certain death without fear. As a general fact, fear of death declines as religion breaks down. The fear of death grows less without weakening sorrow. The feeling is growing that there are worse things than death. The fear of death is not so powerful as it was because the teaching of the Christian heaven and hell is rapidly dropping out of the thoughts of men and women. But even in the days when religious fear was at its height, the fear of death had to be kept down to a certain level, or comfortable life would have been impossible. The fear of death has always been checked to a certain extent, because if it were not life would have been intolerable. It would rob life of its daring and courage. The mere operation of Natural Selection has guarded mankind against the essential teaching of Christianity. Christianity started with an approaching end of the world, but it was soon rejected as

a literal teaching. Fear of death belongs to the jargon of the priests. They taught it to the people as long as they could. The Christian who indulged in that foolish thing is now almost out of being. Religion may distort nature, but only to a limited degree.

The fear of death is a religious fear. Older than Christianity, true, but that is only because Man is older than religion. But it was Christianity which gave the most brutal conception of an after-life to the Western world. It gave death in its most terrible form, and in such a way that few could escape the agony of it. It is said that Christianity made men fearless in the face of death. That is just one more lie added to Heine's "great lying creed." Let anyone get the illustrated booklet on Hell issued by the Roman Church and you will see the most brutal and indecent pictures possible. The pictures of children being tortured in hell are a crime to humanity. The booklet is sold by the authority of the Church.

What Christianity in the Western world did was to clothe a natural fact with supernatural terrors, and then offer a doubtful antidote to counteract the poison that had been injected. The comfort was only necessary so long as the belief was present. Remove the belief and death takes its place as one of the facts of existence, surrounded with all the sadness that properly belongs to the last farewell, but rid of the brutalities Christianity has introduced.

The Freethinker, because he is a Freethinker, needs none of these artificial stimulants in the presence of death. We can also pay the compliment to the Christian to believe that without religion he would not be as brutal as Christianity made him. It is not the Freethinker who lays claim to superiority, it is the Christian who tries to force the claim on him. As a Freethinker, I venture to believe that the difference between the man who believes in a God and the one who does not, is not so profound as the former's teachers would have him believe.

If Freethinkers can lead a decent life without calling an army of gods to help, so I think can Christians. If Atheists can endure pain and sorrow with resignation, so can Christians. I see no reason why Christians should not reach the moral position that Freethinkers have. I really have met some very fine men who call themselves Christians. I believe they were fooling themselves.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### CONVENT WAYS

At our monthly bath each child was provided with a calico chemise, which she was enjoined to wear while bathing, for as Reverend Mother explained to us when she came to give her weekly recommendations: "The Guardian of a child who bathed without a chemise would hide its face with its wings before the Lord in shame."

My Angel Guardian must have had a busy time covering his face, as my practice was to dip the chemise in the water and leave it on the side of the bath while I boldly and sinfully bathed in the nude. One day, however, I hurried through the bath in order to get to confession and left the tell-tale chemise hanging dry on its nail. On my return, the sister-in-charge, after admonishing me for what she called "my grievous sin against the virtue of Chastity," in a shocked and pained voice ordered me to return to confession and inform the priest of my new sin. As Reverend Mother said when told of my offence:

"Would the Blessed Mother of God have bathed without a chemise?"

N. F.

## ANNIE BESANT AND THE "SECRET DOCTRINE"

IN your very interesting account of Mrs. Besant's conversion to Theosophy is a conjecture that William Stead asked her to review Helen Blavatsky's scripture called *The Secret Doctrine*. This is incredible to those of us old enough to have been Stead's contemporaries. Though a gifted journalist he was a complete Philistine to whom literature was not a fine art but simply news. He was as ignorant as it is possible for a newspaper man in possession of his five senses to be on art, science, philosophy: in short, of literature. As to spontaneously approaching Mrs. Besant with *The Secret Doctrine* in his hand, or indeed, approaching her at all, one could as soon believe that he had invited her to come with him to the Opera, the National Gallery, or a meeting of the Aristotelian Society.

What happened was this. I was reviewing books for *The Pall Mall Gazette* at two guineas a column. William Archer had planted me on that paper by handing over a book he had received from it for review to me, and giving me an opportunity of showing what I could do. In due course the literary editor, with whom Stead, the political editor, never interfered, sent me for review *The Secret Doctrine*, a huge tome which I contemplated with dismay, as it meant some weeks of careful reading for three guineas.

Just then Mrs. Besant told me that she was in serious want of money, as her writing for *The National Reformer* and her lecturing for the National Secular Society had ceased with her conversion to Socialism. Could I get her some reviewing to do for *The Pall Mall Gazette*? I immediately thought of *The Secret Doctrine*, and of what Archer had done for me. I gave her the book to review.

Not long after I called at the office of *The Star* and saw among the proofs that littered the editor's table an article headed "How I Became a Theosophist." I turned to the signature. It was Annie Besant. I was utterly confounded. I had done a trick I never intended. I rushed round to the Secular Society's shop in Fleet Street and finding her there in an exasperatingly happy mood, asked her whether she was quite mad, and whether she knew that Madame Blavatsky's shrine at Adyar had just been convincingly shown up as a fraud by an Indian gentleman named Mohini at a meeting of the Psychical Society at which I was present.

It was no use. She actually joked about it: a thing I had never heard her do before. She said she supposed that since she had, as a Theosophist, become a vegetarian, her mind may have been affected.

That was the end of our collaboration. Years later we met at Lady Delawar's, but except on that one occasion we never met again, though my high regard for her never changed. Our separation was entirely her doing.

Like all great public speakers she was a born actress. She was successively a Puseyite Evangelical, an Atheist Bible-smasher, a Darwinian Secularist, a Fabian Socialist, a Strike Leader, and finally a Theosophist, exactly as Mrs. Siddons was Lady Macbeth, Lady Randolph, Beatrice, Rosalind, and Volturnia. She "saw herself" as a priestess above all: That was how Theosophy held her to the end. There was a different leading man every time: Bradlaugh, Robertson, Aveling, Shaw, and Herbert Burrows. That did not matter.

Whoever does not understand this as I, a playwright, do, will never understand the career of Annie Besant.

G. BERNARD SHAW.

Woman, "but once beguiled—and evermore beguiling."

BYRON.

## GRIM EVANGELICALISM

SOME weeks ago, in three issues of this paper, I described, in rather a sketchy and disconnected way a few of my experiences after I had become, at the end of 1907 (aged 22), a convert to the Roman Catholic Church, of which I remained a member until 1926. I had been a member of a family connected on both sides with Evangelical—indeed, on the material side with severe Puritanic—Protestant Non-conformity, but had revolted from that atmosphere even in boyhood. Now I propose to go back to my experiences of that dour sectarianism.

My mother (Augusta Viola Wall, *nee*) was an elder daughter of William Wall, and his wife, Martha, who early in the nineteenth century had come from Great Elm, Somersetshire, and had settled in London. My grandfather was a sturdy, determined man of rugged character. When he came to London—it must have been in the 30s of last century—although some of his ancestors had been wealthy, he was poor because others of them had been spendthrifts. He even sold newspapers, I am told, in the street. He was, however, as already remarked, a strong type—intellectually and physically—and he accumulated money. In the New Southgate district of North London is a section which used to be called "The Freehold." Its name originated from the fact that in those old days settlers "squatted" on the then deserted land and built houses without any legal title deeds. William Wall built "Hampden House," and "took over" some land adjoining. He built up a gas-products company, and prospered. He had a numerous family, some of the sons being named after Puritan heroes: Oliver Cromwell Wall, John Hampden Wall, etc. He was a strict Fundamentalist Congregationalist of the Cromwellian "Independent" type. The Bible was taken as verbally inspired; hell was believed to be a grim reality; the God worshipped was the Old Testament Jehovah; Sabbatarianism was rigidly enforced. There was little heard of God's "love," but a lot of his "wrath." I remember a text—"Thou God see'st me," and how I felt that an angry eye was watching all my naughty acts. (H. G. Wells, in his "Autobiography," narrates a similar experience with that text.)

My mother married in 1884, James Follett Poynter, a younger son of James Poynter, at one time Horse Department Manager of the Great Northern Railway. His family also was Congregationalist, but of a rather less severe type. Nevertheless, they were Fundamentalists and Sabbatarians.

I was the first child, and was born on October 29, 1885. My father was then a commercial traveller, but was going through severe financial troubles. As I write—November 12, 1947—he is still alive, and at the age of over 85, is fairly active. He was a strong man, never daunted by misfortune. Eventually he built up the Sir Hiram Maxim's Electric Lamp Company which still persists. My mother died in 1931, of cancer, at the age of 71, and a year or two later my father married again. I had two sisters and four brothers. One brother—Leslie John—was killed near the end of World War One. All the others survived and in various ways are prosperous.

I was a "queer" child—emotional, nervous, headstrong. I loved books and was very "shy." I was deeply influenced by the Puritanic religious atmosphere. God was to me a relentless tyrant, ever watchful to send us to hell for our sins. At 21, I went for the first time on a train on a Sunday—and, though I had long lost any real intellectual belief in the old creed, I had an emotional fear: "What if God punishes me for this by having a train smash? Should I go to hell?" I did not entertain such an expectation seriously; it "clung to me" as John Henry Newman's "The Pope is Anti-Christ" had clung to him long after he was a Catholic—clung as a nervous "false conscience."

We had to go to chapel every Sunday morning and evening, but I hated it. I could not stand the sermons at Park Chapel, Crouch End, though, I believe, the then minister, Dr. Alfred Rowland, was an able, eloquent man. It was simply that I was too romantic and fond of colour to take to Puritanism. I was so unruly—even, as a small boy, trying to climb the pillars of the chapel during service!—that before I was very "old" it was given up taking me to chapel. I may say we had next to no definite theological system. No Catechism or verbal Creed: simply "Bible reading" and hymns, with prayers. The result of this was that I had no intellectual basis of religion, but was left to form my own beliefs—under the influence always of a stern Puritan system of discipline. In early boyhood I revolted. I remember saying at ten, "I don't believe the Bible."

My home atmosphere thus was religiously severe but intellectually had no basis. As I have said, I was a "queer" child. My father was a good man, but stern and conventional. I was, I must admit, often "rowdy"—and from ten to twenty-one I had a long, grim ordeal of torture. My father took me periodically to doctors to have me psychiatrically tested; I was of course always pronounced to be sane, but at 20 or thereabouts, the continuous ordeal of inquisitorialism had produced a nervous breakdown, and I spent seven months in a hospital. When I came out I made a voyage to and from Australia as a steward on an emigrant ship, the Aberdeen White Star, s.s. "Damascus." On my return I had resolved to join the Roman Catholic Church: my incentives thereto being desire for certitude. I have given some account of this in my three articles, "Catholic Experiences."

At sixty-two (1947) I am largely crippled with arthritis, and this is a direct though distant consequence of my awful ten years' torture from 1897 to 1907. My father meant well. He was and is a good man; but the tyrannical Victorian Puritanism made it impossible for, in that atmosphere, a romantic, intellectualist lad like me to be understood. What I have to say of that religious climate, then, is that it to a great extent blasted my life and even yet may be the remote cause of my premature death: should such occur. The Roman Catholic Church, by giving me "colour" and "life," to some extent remedied the ill-effects, and so I am grateful to it even though (rightly or wrongly) I lost faith eventually in its dogmas. (Note, "rightly or wrongly.") Of Puritan Evangelicalism, however, as experienced by James William Poynter—the writer of this article—it is needful to say that its dourness and oppressiveness almost (or quite) spoiled one life.

J. W. POYNTER.

## AN APOSTLE OF HUMANISM

"Rabelais laughing in his easy chair."—POPE.

"I class Rabelais with the great creative minds of the world—Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes."—COLERIDGE.

THE popular idea of Rabelais coincides with Pope's famous line. He is pictured as one who laughs and mocks at all things—a hog for appetite, a monkey for tricks. He has been described as a great moral teacher, a grossly obscene writer, a reckless buffoon, a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Freethinker. To paint him as a moral teacher alone is to ignore the innate drollery of his character. To set him up as a mere mountebank is to forget the stern reality which underlies his writings. Other unconscious ironists would turn the first of French humorists into a trumpery ecclesiastical historian. To treat Rabelais as destitute of all serious purpose in art or life is even a greater error. Whatever Rabelais may have been, he was not a trifler. He had seen ecclesiastical life from the inside, and he hated priests with every drop of his blood. He studied Greek when it was a hated and forbidden language. He was an enthusiastic

disciple of the new learning in an age when scholars carried their lives in their hands. His noble zeal for intellectual freedom, untrammelled by priestcraft, entitles him to rank with Erasmus and Von Hutten as an apostle of humanism.

François Rabelais was of middle-class parentage. He was born in 1483, near the lovely little city of Chinon, on the Vienne, where Henry II cursed his sons, and died. He always regarded Touraine, its cities, rivers, and vineyards, with affectionate admiration. The fact of his father having been an innkeeper was used as a weapon against him in literary controversy. His father, unfortunately, wished to make him a priest. Accordingly, little François was sent, at nine years of age, to the Benedictine monks of Scully, so young that the white shirt was put over the child's frock. Later, Rabelais was removed to the Franciscan Monastery of Fontenoy le Comte. The Franciscan vows seem to have included ignorance as well as celibacy and poverty. He remained there for fifteen years, taking priest's orders in 1511, at the age of twenty-eight. It is to this long period spent among the ignorant, bigoted, narrow sons of the great lying Catholic Church that we owe his undying hatred of priestcraft. It breaks out in every page of his writings—now passionately, now sorrowfully, with a cry of rage, a sob of pain, or a laugh of scorn. He hated the "monk birds" more bitterly than even Erasmus, for his nature was stronger.

At the age of forty he came into the world a free man—free, that is, to follow his studies—burning with a pathetic enthusiasm for the new learning. He threw aside the hated monastic garb, and became secretary to the Bishop of Maillezais. About 1530 he went to the University of Montpellier with the intention of getting a medical degree. Remark that at this time, when Rabelais is following the lectures, he is already within sight of his fiftieth year. Two years later he went to Lyons where he held an appointment as physician to the hospital. His friend, Etienne Dolet, was already established as a printer in the place. Rabelais's connection with the first reformers of France is certain; the extent difficult to determine. Rabelais had no desire for the martyr's crown. He never contemplated following Calvin into exile, or Berquin to the stake. His sympathies were antagonistic to all dogmas. He held Luther and Calvin in almost as much abhorrence as the priests. The society of Des Perriers, Dolet, and the Lyonnais Freethinkers was more congenial to his habits of thought. Moreover, he had excellent reasons for knowing the power of the great lying Church and the pious malignity of her hired assassins.

Heretics were then handed over to the secular arm to be burnt for the good of their souls and the greater glory of God, and François Rabelais did not intend, if he could help it, to be butchered to make a Roman holiday. When he was denounced as a heretic, he challenged his enemies to produce a heretical proposition from his writings. They were unequal to the task; but, none the less, the heresy was there. Rabelais's caution was necessary if he wished to live. Three at least of his contemporaries suffered for heresy. Dolet was burnt, Des Perriers was driven to suicide, Marot was a half-starved wanderer in Piedmont. Rabelais may be excused for not wishing to be "saved by fire." His sense of humour always prevented him from becoming a fanatic.

It has been said that Rabelais despised women. He did not write till an age when the passion of youth had consumed itself to ashes. Passion was killed in Rabelais by that hateful system of monkhood which has filled Christendom with unspeakable horrors. Poor Rabelais! A whole half of humanity absent from his mind. Love, the central fire of the universe, the source of all human joys and sympathies, the bond of society, appears, in the accursed monastic system in which he was trained, as corruption and depravity. The damnable discipline surrounded Rabelais from the time he wore a child's frock till he was a man of forty, and the best side of his nature was strangled. He never loved, never even thought of loving. He had no more respect for women than a eunuch in an eastern seraglio.

Nay more, there had even been crushed out of him that love for his mother which characterises every Frenchman worthy of the name. Alone among French writers he has no filial piety. As the old galley-slave may be known by the dragging foot, on which was once the fetter, so when the unlovely years have eaten away manhood, imprisoned with its blind instincts and objectless passions, the ex-monk is known by his sexless mind. Thrice poor Rabelais! The monkish devils spoiled his life. The robe he wore was to him like a bodily deformity, corrupting his mind, narrowing his views. Originally, his nature must have been lofty and beautiful—witness those exquisite chapters in which he describes the monks of Thelema, whose motto was "Liberty." His death was unexpected. We may picture the rage of the Christians when their old enemy, now almost within their pious clutches, slipped quietly out of their eager hands. The great lying Catholic Church never forgets, and priests never forgive. It was well for the old man that his life was not prolonged. Rabelais went further than contempt for the trappings of Christianity. He rejected it altogether. There cannot be the slightest doubt that Rabelais was a Freethinker. He hoped to cure the evil of religion by spreading knowledge, by bringing priestcraft into contempt, by widening the boundaries of thought. He knew as much as any man of his time. He was acquainted with the book of the world, and not merely with the world of books. He studied science and practised medicine. He knew practically everything there was to be known. His life was spent in the pursuit of knowledge. Liberty was Rabelais's sovereign specific for the ills of his time. He found his contemporaries tied and bound with chains of their own manufacture. His purpose was to break their fetters and set them free.

A. T.

## LIFE'S FITFUL FEVER

### I

"The man that hath great griefs I pity not.  
'Tis something to be great."

SO says T. E. Brown, one of our forgotten minor poets. He is right, except that greatness of any sort is denied to most people. Even the greatness of grief is really a commonplace. Each one may think his personal grief—loss of wife, parent, child, or other dear kin, or lover; loss of property, of health, of any possession valued till it seemed an integral part of life—to be supreme disaster.

But it has happened, is happening, and will happen to several million more persons. The individual himself will recover from it. There may be such a thing as a broken heart, but it rarely occurs with catastrophic suddenness. When it does appear to do so the sufferer often recuperates nearly as swiftly.

More tragic—yet that is not the word, because tragedy implies great conflict with mighty powers, and that seldom comes to anyone—more pathetic is the slow petrifying of the heart, the toughening but dulling endurance of petty trials and troubles, of the persistent fretting triviality of existence; till soul or spirit fails to react, having hardened into a leathery consistency upon which the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune fall with as little effect, with no more penetration than the joys and pleasures.

For "All, all are men,  
Condemned alike to groan,  
The tender for another's pain,  
The unfeeling for his own."

Triviality is the keynote of life, the characteristic, the prevailing feature; almost one might say the inspiration and the driving force. The vast majority of people would be surprised, perturbed, upset, some terrified at being asked to do anything great or having greatness thrust upon them.

The lives of hundreds of millions of the world's inhabitants are engrossed in trifles, as they themselves are trifles upon the face of the earth, which is itself a trifle in the galactic system, and that only a trifle of the universe.

So we dress and undress, shave and wash and bath, eat and drink, go to our little daily routines and indulge tiny hobbies in our leisure hours, sleep and wake again, till some day we sleep for ever, and then—

Says Browning: "A whisper from a hairbell,  
Someone's death."

## II

If we consider the occupations of humanity they seem equally trivial to the degree of futility. Masses of human beings toil on the land or tend animals, fish and hunt, build and construct, labour in mines and quarries, factories and forges, mills and workshops, on roads and railways; some even more petty keep accounts and write records and letters, or practise professions where they are unknown beyond their own immediate circles.

The soldier, like the civilian, the sailor and the airman becomes of less individual importance as the population of the world increases and mechanism reduces man to a puny machine minder, whether of production, transport or slaughter.

Well does Burns sadly sing—

"Like a snowflake on the river;  
Just a gleam and gone for ever."

Surely one of the most effective similes ever thought!

Nor is the position of the great ones of the earth much better than that of common men, doubtfully more enviable, equally short, nasty and brutish. Great men and women sing or act, paint or compose or write, orate or govern or otherwise practise exhibitionism; others more greatly still arrogate dominance over millions of their kind, distributing misery and death with callous flippancy and disregard for consequences or human feeling.

"Man, proud man,  
Dressed in a little brief authority,  
Plays such tricks before high heaven  
As would make angels weep."

Yet they burn out, leaving but hollow echoes mockingly entitled fame.

"As gods they lived,  
Like men they died."

Or as Hamlet suggested—

"Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay,  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away."

## III

The human swarm has been compared to an overturned ant-hill, to a beehive, to the westward rush of the lemmings to perish in the ocean, to an enormous herd or flock, to the fall of autumn leaves.

Perhaps the unending millions being born, living and working and playing, growing old and dying—what is life but an incident between the two accidents of birth and death?—most resemble an uncountable crowd moving slowly towards the edge of a gigantic cliff. Those behind continually push forward; they cannot do otherwise, for the press behind them to immeasurable distance is irresistible. So for ever the front ranks are thrust hurtling over the cliff's verge, to fall away to nothingness.

Even the orthodox hymn-writer, Doctor Watts, heightens into poetry and truth when faced with reality—

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream—  
Dies at the opening day."

A. R. WILLIAMS.

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

1. What conclusive evidence has ever been produced of the existence of any supernatural deity?—NONE.

2. Can any sane and intelligent person believe in an invisible, immaterial, half-man-half-spirit who is three people in one, father, father's son and some sort of a ghost who knows exactly what every living person is thinking, doing or is about to do, who lets him do it and then punishes him with everlasting burning and torture if he does not bow down and worship him?—No.

3. Is it reasonable in the light of modern knowledge to believe that the fables and fancies related in the Bible are true?—No.

4. Is there any logical reason to suppose that men cannot live good and useful lives without the support of an invisible spirit?—No.

5. What example has God ever given of his all-loving goodness and his all-powerful might?—NONE.

6. What proof is there of the existence of any Devil or evil spirit?—NONE.

7. Does anyone know where Heaven and Hell are situated?—No.

8. Can anyone explain *reasonably* why an all-loving God permits the horrors of war, the slaughter of innocent lives, the ravages of disease, the pain, misery and suffering, the famines caused by drought or flood, the earthquakes and the tempests?—No.

9. Can anyone explain why Christianity *must be true* while all the other religions are *false*?—No.

10. Is it logical to suppose that if God is all-powerful he would allow any evil spirit to oppose him?—No.

11. If God created the first man in his own image then Adam must have been *perfect*, but could anyone be perfect who fell into temptation as Adam did?—No.

12. Is it reasonable to suppose that if God endowed us with intelligence we must not be allowed to use our intelligence where religion is concerned?—No.

13. Is it reasonable that we should be told to put our faith in ignorant superstitions and to believe in an unseen, unheard and unproved spirit simply because some mentally stunted ancients believed in such nonsense?—No.

14. Is there any possible excuse for the vast armies of paid priests, posturing in absurd draperies and professing to be the mouthpieces of this monstrous myth?—No.

15. What *right* has any priest to assume that he is divinely called, to presume to order our daily lives and to inflict his teaching on the young?—NONE.

16. Would not it be better for all if men were taught to rely on their own unaided efforts, to strive after goodness for its own sake and *not* for a promised reward hereafter?—YES.

17. Would it be more fair and just if men were allowed to *think freely* for themselves instead of believing without question the mythical absurdities enforced on the sheep-like masses by a self-interested priesthood under threats of eternal damnation?—YES.

18. If the millions of pounds which the Church has charmed or otherwise taken from the pockets of its dupes, and the hundreds of thousands it spends yearly in the perpetuation of a pagan myth were confiscated and put to a more useful purpose would not it be a benefit to all humanity?—YES.

19. The Bible is placed in the hands of every small child. Would any other book containing a fraction of the obscenities and blood-lust which fill its pages be allowed to be printed?—No.

20. How much longer are intelligent people going to remain slaves to superstition and dominated by an autocratic power that has put itself *above the State* in the name of a non-existent deity?—*God only knows!*

W. H. WOOD.

## ACID DROPS

The "Daily Mirror" reports under a headline, "Prayers Answered," that a procession of Moors marched through Tangier yesterday praying for rain—and rain fell. Our own witch doctors during this summer either did not pray hard or loud enough, or did not know the right approach. The Moors have obviously got something the Christians haven't got. We suggest that our witch doctors be deported to Tangier—*en masse*—to serve an apprenticeship with the Moors, and that they be kept there until they have learned the correct method. We cannot help feeling a slight twinge of pity for the Moors.

Despite the declining interest in organised religion, says a pious weekly, it is a debatable point whether true religion has not a firmer hold on the majority of people than ever, in fact, many leading ministers declare that it has. We like that "true religion," it is something that can be anything, and *anything* can be nothing. It is admitted that never have there been fewer people attending church than is the case to-day. There is no evidence that people even pray as much as formerly. People no longer look to the Church for guidance, and the Sabbath, the once main feature of religion in England, is rapidly losing favour. Religious leaders cry out for more ministers, not because there are more needed, but because it would make a better show. Taking it all round, we are amused at the so-called progress of the Church. In business circles it would be described as a rapid break down.

Changes are taking place that are worth noting. There was a time when people took God as they found him. They had to. God was there and the people had to make the best of the situation. But we doubt whether there was a single occasion when the majority of people would not have cheerfully dispensed with god if they could have done so. But with everything coming from God, some notice had to be taken of him. But gradually Man began to do things without the help of God, and the more Man tried, the more confident he became. A new sense of values appeared; the old saying that "God helps them that help themselves," became quite popular. But the situation became dangerous—for the Gods. People began to realise that if they could manage without God, there was no sense in bothering God. The situation now is that sensible people realising that God does nothing, He is not necessary to explain anything, and careful examination proves that He is nothing.

A few hundred years before God decided to send His only son to earth—who got himself into serious trouble—the Chinese discovered how to make gunpowder. Not being acquainted with the Christian practice of warfare, the poor heathen Chinese could not put the gunpowder to better use than making squibs and crackers and fireworks. In due course some Christian travellers came to China, and saw what the miserable heathens had discovered. The travellers saw, they wondered, and then realised that there was a much better use for gunpowder than mere squibs. It was soon seen how deadly the new material could be, scores could be killed where in ordinary warfare only a few could be killed. War became a fascinating game where previously it was rather dull. Now many more heathens could be blown to Hell.

The "Universe" has made a discovery. Archbishop McGrath suggests that the position of the Roman Catholic Church is not so good as it would have the public believe. For instance, it is a dictum of the Catholic Church that "once a member, always a member." One need never go to church, or obey any of the rules, but one is always considered a child of the Church; true, one may be thrown out with a long string of curses, but this is rarely done, and only under exceptional circumstances. Curses that accompany certain excommunications could be very horrible if they were not so profoundly ridiculous.

It really looks as if things are bad for the Church, particularly so when an Archbishop says so. He complains that people are treating God with indifference, and only a few realise the tragedy of the world to-day is because of this indifference to God. Someone should tell the Archbishop that it is time that God left things alone. Ever since man existed God and his angels

have been trying to get "his children" to do the "right thing" with the result that the world is in a mess. Man makes many blunders, commits many villainies, but if our Christian teachings are true, then the only logical answer is: "O God, you made me, I am what you made me, and if I now do not act as you would have me do, the responsibility rests with you."

Six young children who had just been "confirmed" sheltered under a tree during a storm (God's storm). The children were struck by lightning and killed. The church nearby was also struck, and many people were injured. The information comes from a Catholic newspaper, and the account concludes with the news that work for restoring the church was begun at once. We would ask: "Whose is the responsibility?"

We are not surprised to find that the staid newspaper "The Spectator" was ashamed rather than shocked at the foolish scenes enacted at the Royal Wedding. The action of those men and women kneeling and kissing the place on which the Royal couple stood, is enough to disgust most people. The "Spectator" calls the whole scene "blasphemous."

Every argument for a personal God, must also postulate a personal Devil. The belief in one is as universal as the belief in the other—and as necessary. Both have been seen—in visions—and to the vast majority of Christian believers throughout the ages, the activity of the Devil has been manifested and more universal than that of God. The fear of Christians shivering in the prospect of endangering their souls, has been the most powerful of all causes in bolstering faith in God as the only position by which they may be saved.

To find a collection of all sorts of religionists on the same platform is rather unusual, and of this collection, one of the speakers, a Bishop said that "We are driven as by a hurricane, to recover our common ground, and to do together what we cannot do apart. To destroy God is to destroy our Christian heritage." It is surprising that it never seems to strike this type of person that—as one of the Roman philosophers said—the gods should look after themselves. We shall expect these religious people to band themselves together under the title of "Organisation for the Protection of God."

Cardinal Griffiths is getting worried. "Secularism and Materialism in England will lead to a Dark Age, unless we return to God." We have seen what happened in the "Dark Ages" when God had us all to Himself. The Medieval times when the Roman Catholic Church was all-powerful, when the rack and thumbscrew, the iron maiden and the auto-da-fe were considered the right way to deal with "heretics", is one of the bloodiest chapters in the history of mankind. Those times were rightly named the "Dark Ages", and we stress again that this was the time when the Christian religion was all-powerful. The Cardinal is not only worried he is slightly confused, or perhaps he knows his congregation.

"Pan-Africa," a journal of African life and culture, and champion of the rights of coloured people, is up against the barrier that all outspoken journals meet at one time or another. We take the following from the October-December issue:—

"As we go to press we learn that the Belgian Government has banned the entry of 'Pan-Africa' into the Belgian Congo. We have not so far made mention of the Belgian Congo in our pages, but the Belgian Government has recognised, and rightly so, that the expression of free African opinion anywhere constitutes the greatest threat to the continued existence of slave labour in any part of the world. and, in particular, the Congo, where it is the very basis of Belgian economy."

The Editor of "Pan-Africa" comments that this may be the first step to suppress Pan-Africa completely. We can only add that the Congo is a part of God's earth, the Belgian Government is thereby God's will. Boycott, ban and suppression are dear to the hearts of Christians. By their fruits ye shall know them.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

## THE BISHOP AND CHRISTIANITY

### II

IN his "Rise of Christianity," Bishop Barnes is, as far as "Modernism" is concerned, *plus royaliste que le roi*. He examines the Gospels with the eye of a student steeped in the very latest conclusions of advanced scholars as to how these four slender books came into being. They have occasioned the most intense studies on the part of all-believing and half-believing theologians, every word in them has been pondered over, every incident analysed, numerous speculations have been advanced, and the result is confusion greater than ever. Nobody knows who wrote for certainty a single Gospel or Epistle or Acts either in the canonical New Testament or in its Apocrypha. Nobody knows when or where any were written. And most of the scholars, like Bishop Barnes himself, are quite sure of only one thing, and that is that the New Testament was *not* divinely revealed. The books composing it are the work of fallible men, credulous, superstitious, woefully ignorant of history or the necessity of writing history, and only endowed with a fanatical faith now known to be—let us be frank about it—just balderdash. The idea that there is a God who came down to earth to be crucified so as to "save" man—it is never clear what for or why—accompanied with a galaxy of devils and angels, a Hell and a Heaven, is the most fantastic nonsense ever conceived. It is far sillier than anything in the "Arabian Nights."

All through his book we can see that Bishop knows this as well as any "blatant" Atheist. He is forced to admit over and over again in his examination of the Gospels that here is symbolism and there allegory and never either one or the other can be regarded as history.

For him, Mark is the earliest Gospel, but who was Mark? "We do not know." But he may have been a "Christian," and as "Aramaic appears to have been his mother tongue, a Jew." And, "When did Mark write? Unfortunately we cannot say." Thus overboard goes the orthodox contention—nay, positive statement—that Mark was written about the year 68 in Rome. Dr. Barnes thinks "the gospel might have been written" about A.D. 85, but he produces no evidence.

The author of Luke and Acts was, it is contended, the same person, but was he the "beloved physician" of Paul? After a thorough examination of the orthodox evidence, the Bishop thinks "it is highly probable that Luke, the actual author of the third gospel and of Acts, was not Luke, the physician." Now, one of the strongest arguments advanced by the orthodox is that the narratives in Luke and Acts are vouched for by a "physician"—generally meaning, of course, that a physician 2,000 years ago was just like a physician these days, a man

who has a long course of training in hospitals and in a University like Lord Horder, for example. I believe that in their enthusiasm some devout apologists go so far as to consider Luke the greatest physician who ever lived—except, perhaps, Jesus. It is refreshing to find this kind of drivel has no place with Bishop Barnes.

The general orthodox date given for Luke and Acts is about the year 63—Dr. Barnes, however, says they "were both written after A.D. 93" with the proviso that in the form we have them the date is about "the period A.D. 150-175." Not very pleasant this for genuine believers.

The date given for Matthew is generally about 68, but with Bishop Barnes it is round about A.D. 95-100—again with the proviso that this does not imply "that there are in it no late editorial changes." Or, in other words, these three Gospels as we have them this day cannot be dated earlier than A.D. 150 as W. R. Cassels' in his "Supernatural Religion"—a book never mentioned by the Bishop—so triumphantly maintained. Christian speculation can run riot as to rough or early drafts of the Gospels, no one can say, yea or nay; but the finished article in all probability became generally known between A.D. 150 and 180, and among such naive and credulous fools as the early Christians undoubtedly were, all sorts of legendary accretions can gather in narratives not fixed by printing during the course of 100 years.

But the reader must always be on guard when discussing these dates. It would not matter two hoots to the Freethought case if the Gospels were actually written within ten years of the supposed death of Jesus. A miracle is just as impossible as a God, no matter what the dating is and I often suspect that all these anxious inquiries as to the dating of the Gospels is deliberately made to prevent people thinking too much about their absurd contents.

When we get to John we come to "the chief enigma" of the New Testament for it must be obvious even to the unlearned—or particularly to them—that if Jesus was as depicted in this Gospel he must have been quite a different person from the figure we get in the other three, the Synoptics. There can be no argument here whatever, it is not just a Freethought contention, but one recognised by almost all Christian scholars. "We know nothing of the author of the fourth gospel," admits Dr. Barnes, and he even goes so far as to say that the same writer may not have written the three Epistles of John either. The writer, according to the Bishop, may have been a teacher engaged in anti-Jewish controversy, who also gave addresses, largely symbolic, to Christian gatherings, "and in due course these addresses were combined into a life of Jesus which bore some resemblance to the tradition formulated in the synoptic gospels"—a most delightful admission. The Bishop implies here that a pious Christian deliberately forged his own symbolic addresses into a life of Jesus and palmed this off so successfully that it has been accepted by the Christian world in general as a life of the Son of God, vouched for by God himself. John is therefore an unblushing forgery—yet, I believe, it is taken to be true by some of the Rationalist opponents of the Myth theory when they set out to prove that Jesus was a man—miracles of course excepted. In the old copies, as the Revised Version proves, the story of the woman taken in adultery is not found, it was inserted later, and is even at this day accepted by believers in Jesus the man because it depicts exactly what Jesus must have done; it is so like him! Words here fail me.

But what Dr. Barnes does see is the "symbolism" behind the stories—like the one (John ix, 1-12) which shows how Jesus cured a blind man. Catholics, Mormons, Presbyterians, Plymouth Brethren, Protestants, and even many bishops of the Church of England, brothers of Bishop Barnes, all believe in the reality of the cure—a genuine cure of a blind man. "But we notice," says Dr. Barnes, "that it was not the cure of a man who had become blind: his blindness was from birth. Many, it is true, are spiritually blind from birth; but, while

this birth-blindness in no way detracts from the symbolism of the miracle, it also emphasises its improbability." The reader should study this disingenuous piece of "apologetic."

There is not the slightest reason why the incidents in the Synoptic Gospels are not also symbolic. It is the fashion for modernists to give up something they cannot explain or accept in John as symbolic or allegoric, but I have never been able to see why those actions of Jesus which are not miraculous, described in Matthew, Mark and Luke, should also not be symbolic. I hold that all the Gospels contain "Mysteries," that is, the occult, and were never by their original authors meant to be taken literally. It was necessary to make Jesus a Man-God or a God-Man (either of which is just as improbable as God or Jehovah) or actually a living being, to get his story accepted by the "vulgar," as the beginning of a new cult or religion. It took two or three hundred years—but it was successful, so successful indeed that eminent Rationalists can still talk of a real Jesus, a man, when there is nothing whatever in his story but "symbolism." And the more I read "The Rise of Christianity," the more I was convinced that this is probably the attitude of the author himself.

H. CUTNER.

## GANDHI AND HIS RELIGIOUS VIEWS ON WAR

WHEN Gandhi visited London during the second round table Conference in 1931, he was asked if he wanted *all* forms of machinery in India to be done away with and prohibited, including pumping-stations, reservoirs and modern irrigation works. He was also asked if he wanted to make any plans for making India debt-free, especially the poverty-stricken peasants, most of whom were known to be eternally in the cruel hands of land-exploiting money-lenders in the towns.

His reply to (1) was an emphatic "Yes" (but he still wanted to retain Singer sewing machines) and to (2) all he would say was, "That is really a religious question," and left it at that.

In the course of this interview, he was found to reveal a mind that was tricky, politically astute, fanatical, and floating upon a bottomless ocean of childlike simplicity. Although a powerful personality, nevertheless he was heedless of the politico-economic situation that he was helping to create.

The fanaticism and trickiness of his mind and spirit was shown at once in his "No machinery—but I would like thousands of sowing machines in the villages," and his childlike astuteness in his brushing aside of the entire financial spider's web of debt usury with those words, "That is really a religious question." It is as astute as it is fundamentally true, but does not reach down from Heaven to Earth. It is childlike because, like a child, he could not say "I know nothing whatever about economics or finance." Like a child he swept away all such difficult questions with, "Father Christmas will see to that."

It will be pretty obvious, therefore, that Gandhi is determined to make religion and politics merge together. His philosophic basis was, and still is, faulty. There is a fatal "Yes-No" contradiction in it—"No machinery—We want machines." He gave the self-same contradictory answer when giving his views upon war. A few days ago he was addressing his prayer-meeting at Delhi, during which he told his followers there that he had always opposed warfare, but if there was no other way of obtaining justice from Pakistan, and if Pakistan persistently refused to accept conciliation, then the Indian Union Government would have to go to war against it! So again you get the same contradictory illusion. "No violence—but war if there is no other way." This is but another way of saying, "No one wanted war, but he could never advise anyone to put up with injustice."

It was reported by Reuters that, "If all Hindus were annihilated for a just cause, he would not mind. If there was

war the Hindus in Pakistan could not be fifth columnists. If their loyalty lay not with Pakistan they should leave it. Similarly, Muslims whose loyalty was with Pakistan should not stay in the Indian Union."

Now, Gandhi has not, it appears, denied that he made this statement to his "prayer-meeting" recently, so we can take it that Reuters report is correct. Therefore, in that case, Gandhi is not so much a "Great Soul" as a "Lost Soul." Sixteen years or so ago he was seen to be possessed of those glinting, tricky and strangely childlike eyes as he sat wrapped up in his white robe in an East End Hotel. To-day can still be seen exactly the self-same beetle-quick shift that has always entangled his "Satyagraha" teaching, and that made him declare for "No machinery—but thousands of Singer sewing machines"—has now pushed him into an utterly impossible position regarding more serious matters. "I have always opposed all warfare," he declares, "but if there is no other way, then we must go to war."

Now, you will see that this is precisely what Hitler said from 1933 to 1939, and it is just what Churchill would say to-day. It is precisely what Stalin is saying, day by day, through the mouthpieces of Molotov and others.

By uttering one word in favour of using armed force, Gandhi smashes at a single blow the whole foundation of his religious, ethical and political doctrines, and prepares the way either for a Hindu "Lenin," or for a Hindu "Hitler."

So then, we can dismiss for the present, at all event, Gandhi and his shifting sands of "Satyagraha" and non-violence.

(Condensed from "Hargrave's Weekly Message.")

E.H.S.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.—This interview originally appeared in the monthly review, "Paru," by permission of which I have made the translation which follows. Since Sartre's plays and novels have already been published in this country, and since "Reprieve," which is dealt with at some length, is scheduled for publication by Messrs. Hamish Hamilton, it seemed to me that the English public might be interested in knowing what Sartre himself feels about the value and importance of his work. I have slightly condensed the interview as it originally appeared, but the main points of it are contained in the translation which follows.—J. R.]

THE cafe, at six o'clock in the evening, the mists drifting in, is full to the doors. One pushes oneself past the tables, in an atmosphere thick with smoke and with contending voices. The faces around are at one and the same time unknown and vaguely familiar, and the talking groups are sometimes compact and sometimes loosely knit. The chairs surge into the alleyways between the tables. Late-comers seat themselves in cramped positions. They feel themselves to be useless spectators of something which might be important.

Sartre makes his entry, immediately greeted with signs and words. Someone hails him, someone approaches him, someone else follows him. He resists. I know that he intends to have the conversation which he has promised me. At last we find ourselves seated in a quiet corner of a room on the first floor.

Philosopher, novelist, dramatist, critic, journalist, capable of expressing himself in all these ways with equal ease, Sartre is there, simple and friendly, open to all questions, his spirit abounding, his words brief and clear.

"How are you?" And that extremely banal opening question has a very precise significance for him.

"I am on the point of perishing from suffocation. I hope at least that this crowd is not made up entirely of snobs—snobs for and snobs against, all curious with a stupid curiosity, to see the evil master, the pernicious philosopher, as the chorus of my critics are singing. I am eager to dissipate the misunderstandings which men who read badly spread among those who do not read at all. It is necessary to seem strange if one wishes to bring forward evidence. . . ."



"When one thinks in what a sea of incomprehension and bad faith you have been swimming."

"We are constantly reproached, we Existentialists, with pessimism, the blackness of our 'philosophy of despair.' This reproach is very surprising. It is in the name of common sense that these critics judge us. Now, what is that idea of man which their wisdom proposes to us? Look at its proverbs, its precepts, its stories, and its fables. All show us a man capable of the worst, inclined towards the worst by his very nature. And what does it say, the wisdom of the nations, before the weaknesses, the cowardices, the villainies, the basenesses of men? Not 'It is repugnant,' but 'It is human'—as if there was in man some essential and unavoidable weakness which would be an excuse for him. We say that there is no such thing as an abstract human nature, that there is no essential and immutable essence of man—an abstract possibility, a platonic idea which will determine individual existences. We say that in man freedom precedes his essence, that it creates the essential man in action, that man makes it by his own choice, and that he is thus always responsible for himself. A philosophy of despair? Yes, doubtless in the measure in which we accord no sense to the transcendent hopes of the metaphysicians and the religious folk. There is not any traceable road which leads man to his salvation. It is necessary for him all the time to invent his own road. But, in order to invent it, he is free, responsible, without any external excuse. All his hope must be in himself. This morning I met someone who reproached me with my optimism. At last!"

"What is, in this perspective, the sense which you give to the notions of 'abandonment' and 'despair,' which have been so irritatingly abused to-day?"

"These are very simple ideas and they give immediate rise to various reflections. Man is free. It is man himself who makes his world. He is responsible for himself and for the world. He decides by his choice, by his judgment. He cannot refuse to choose, because the very refusal will itself be a choice. And he must choose alone, without help and without refuge. Nothing outside him can decide whether he wishes to receive or accept. He must make his choice for himself down to the smallest detail. That is what we have called his 'abandonment'—a consequence of his freedom. As for 'despair,' it is the price of the consciousness of that freedom, the recognition that my future is my own possibility, that it depends only on me to bring it into existence, that I am separated from it only by my own freedom of choice. There is nothing there which is humiliating for man, as has often been said. On the contrary. . . ."

"What do you think of the ideas of morality which are so frequently brought against your 'The Age of Reason' and 'The Reprieve'? Your characters are controlled by their most ignoble instincts. The man of Sartre is a man of low taste, etc."

"I think that what above all makes my characters embarrassing is their lucidity. They know what they are, and they choose to be so. Hypocrites or blind men are more acceptable. People are annoyed that a story of an abortion is at the centre of 'The Age of Reason.' Because—after all—because, in 1938, a man tried to secure an abortion, it was thus that he existed. Why voluntarily close one's eyes to facts? Statistics demonstrate beyond all doubt that there are more abortions in one year than there are employees of the tramways. Who would be disturbed at a novel written around the tramwaymen? But I go farther; yes, doubtless Mathieu is guilty of refusing his child. But one can find sensible reasons for his action—not to compromise Marcelle, not to hurt her mother. . . . Those who are shocked are not fully acquainted with the world, for many women refuse to bear their children for the sole reason that it is more convenient not to have them. Yes, Mathieu is guilty. But his true fault is not where my critics have seen it. It is less in the abortion which he proposes to Marcelle than in the eight-year engagement without love which preceded it—or

rather that Mathieu never truly engaged himself to Marcelle. Not because they are not married; marriage is in my view an indifferent act, it is only the social form of the engagement. He is to be blamed because he well knew that this liaison was not truly a dual enterprise. They visited each other four times a week, they said that they told each other everything. In reality they never ceased to lie to each other, because their relationship itself was a false and lying one."

"The development and elucidation of freedom is at the heart of your philosophic book, 'L'Etre et le Néant.' The problem of freedom is also the principal theme of your novels. In what sense is this to be understood?"

"Man is free in the fullest and strongest sense. His freedom is not in him as a property of his humanity. He is not in existence first and free afterwards. He is free as part of his existence. There is no distance between his existence and his freedom. But the man who is thus condemned to freedom must also free himself, since he does not immediately recognise himself to be free, or since he may well mistake the sense of his freedom. This progress of the free man towards freedom—this is the paradox of freedom, and it is also the theme of my books. It is the history of a deliverance and a liberation. But it is not achieved. 'The Age of Reason' and 'The Reprieve' are not only an inventory of false, incomplete, mutilated freedoms, a description of the applications of freedom. It is only in the final volume of the trilogy, 'The Last Chance,' that the conditions of true liberation are defined."

"Is it not necessary to see in Mathieu and Brunet, in this sphere of frustrated freedom, the two opposite poles?"

"Exactly. Mathieu incarnates that total disengagement which Hegel calls terrorist freedom and which is really anti-freedom. It resembles Orestes at the beginning of my play, 'The Flies,' without weight, without attachment, without a tie in the world. He is not free because he has not engaged himself. He has not really engaged himself with regard to Marcelle, since he has not made with her a life for two. He has not engaged himself in the Spanish War, under the pretext that it was not his job. But there is not any such enterprise which I can begin to make for myself. The Spanish War would become his if he is truly part of it. He is, indeed, the brother of the workman whom he meets at the beginning of 'The Age of Reason,' who is afraid, who is left, and who is ashamed of himself. Mathieu, in fact, does not engage himself any more in the war. He accepts it, but he does not claim it as his own. He excludes himself from the historic adventures which he amuses himself with. He thinks of his companions of mobilisation as dead men or as survivors; by this he separates himself from them. For Mathieu it is the freedom of indifference, abstract freedom, freedom for nothing. Mathieu is not free, he is nothing, because he is always outside."

"And Brunet is not any more free because he is always inside?"

"Brunet incarnates the spirit of the serious folk, who think of transcendent values, written in the heavens, intelligible, independent of human subjectivity. For him there is an absolute sense of the world and of history which commands his attention. Brunet engages himself because he finds certitude a necessity of life. His engagement is only a passive obedience to this claim. He delivers himself somewhat from 'despair.' But he is not free. Man is free to engage himself, but he is only free if he engages himself to be free. There is another militant life than that of Brunet. But Brunet is a militant who spoils his freedom."

"You have given your trilogy the title 'Roads to Freedom.' If these roads are not impassible, they ought to lead somewhere. Where do they lead?"

"They lead the characters effectively to their freedom. Mathieu finds his love and his enterprise. He engages himself in a free engagement, which gives his world a meaning for him. That will be the subject of 'The Last Chance.'"

"But from 'The Age of Reason' to 'The Reprieve,' does he progress there?"

"No. But he accomplishes the liberation of himself from his past. When the reprieve is reached his affairs are in order, his accounts balanced. Marcelle is no longer a burden in his life. He has preferred to Ivich a girl met casually. He is alone, he is ready for freedom."

"In sum, then, the reprieve, which is not only the derisive reprieve of Munich, is also the reprieve which you ask for your characters?"

"Yes, though nothing of the sort is ever given. One is not born heroic or cowardly, as one is born small or red-headed. One chooses oneself to be a hero or a coward, and that choice can always be questioned. My characters are always in suspense. There is not an absolute sense, fixed for ever, of their conduct. It is their duty which decides the significance of their past, which saves them if they are to be saved. It is too soon to judge them."

We go downstairs. We enter again that massive block of lights, of rumours, of smoke. I take my leave.

Sartre is France's literary hope, a hope of which we are sure that it always will be increasing.

CHRISTIAN GRISOLI.

(Translated by John Rowland)

### COLD COMFORT

EMILY ELLIS was snipping the grave. It was her husband's grave and she enjoyed the task because it reminded her that Fate's shears had done some proper work on Charles. What was he now, down in his coffin? Dust and ashes was but a Sunday way of putting it. Charles—and Emily gave a delicious shiver—was worms. Did each worm think like Charles? Well, let them try to carry on. The male Charles worm and the female Charles worm. Who'd get the better of that? Let them bang away in the coffin and serve them right. It was worth keeping the grave tidy so that the court of justice might be in order.

Snip, snip, went the shears; and then Emily moved the glass case with the wax flowers. She wanted to trim round the plate of bare earth where the perpetual flowers sat heavy. Perpetual flowers! They were all he had ever given her—things she could keep for ever and ever. That's how one gives when one hates. When one gives with love, one wants something back for oneself—some new tenderness in the person to whom one gives, some fresh delight for oneself in their pleasure. But Charles gave when custom said he ought to give. Just as he had made Emily go to church on Sunday, never troubling to find out what she thought about it. The perpetual flowers of convention. And now her hideous white lilies helped—to keep him in his place. . . . Snip, snip. . . .

Nothing ever grows from his grave but grass. They say the finger of the perjured man grew from the grave. But Charles, the upright churchman, died whole. It wasn't just the finger that was bad. . . . Snip, snip, and a shadow cut across the grass. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Ellis," said the Vicar.

"Don't think me callous," he went on slowly, "I know you can't find this a good afternoon when your task is such a sad one. But I want to give you a message." Oh, no, thought Emily, not a message . . . not a message from beyond? Not something from Charles.

The Vicar's mouth twisted into a grin. "Let us remember," he said unctuously, "the day of the resurrection of the body." He turned on his heel and walked off to his tea among the model galleons and the shining warming pans.

The resurrection of the body! For the first time since Charles died, Emily burst into tears. The little shears slipped from her fingers, and the two points stuck quivering in the grave.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

### THE TENT-MAKER

THERE is justification in your doubting whether Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyám" may be called a translation. These quatrains of his—Rubáiyát, as this form is styled in Persian—are rather more a version than a translation of the original verses. Omar (c. 11th century), surnamed Khayyám, the tent-maker, after his father's profession, was an erudite deist—said to be a mystic—critical of the current teachings of religion. And blurred though his ideas may be in Fitzgerald's rendering, it was rather daring to publish them at that period. They have their place in English literature, but for all this it would call forth a proper translation of Khayyám in order to do justice to him as well.

When dabbling in Persian as a side-line to my oriental studies in Vienna, I translated, at that time, a few Rubáiyát of Omar's into German. I would be hesitant though, to call the following items a translation owing to the fact that they merely are English versions of my former translations, but anyway, here they are:—

#### FOUR RUBAIYAT BY OMAR KHAYYAM

##### I

You made us, God, with faults and with defection:  
Why then reproach us with our imperfection?  
We are to pay out more than we received.  
That is a crafty deal and no affection!

##### II

Why should I Wine (a work of God) despise?  
I drink—all right. This gives to qualms no rise:  
Pre-known it was to God since the creation.  
Where were His Wisdom did I otherwise?

##### III

Eternal Life will happy be and gay,  
With wine and charming maidens, as they say.  
—There is no guarantee for me, so what  
If an instalment I just take away?

##### IV

Thou hast with traps and many a temptation  
Beset this life of ours, full of privation.  
And yet, thou call'st it "Sin" if we do stumble. . . .  
FORGIVE US, AS THOU NEEDST THYSELF PROBATION!

PERCY L. ROY.

### THIRTY YEARS AGO

PROTEST issued by the Federation of Freethinkers in Portugal against the ridiculous comedy enacted in Fatima, October, 1917:—

"CITIZENS!

Certain persons in power, some in good faith, some otherwise, state that now that the Republic has passed laws for the defence of liberty, of conscience and of thought, the activities of religious societies need not be feared. But taking note of the following happenings we confidently assert that people who make such statements are in error.

A short time ago a certain candidate for deputy was daring enough to insert in his programme the repealing of the law of Separation of Church and State and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

Pastoral letters are appearing ranting against the defence of liberty law and insolently protesting against the just punishments meted out to certain delinquent bishops.

Attempts are being made to re-establish religious orders.

Priests from their pulpits are openly expressing anti-liberal and anti-Republican sentiments.

Certain citizens have been lynched for the horrible crime of not lifting their hats on the passing of one of these carnival shows, commonly known as processions, which should have been long ago forbidden.

But as if all this wasn't enough we have our old friend the miracle against appearing to brutalise the people by appealing to their fanaticism and superstition.

Now, what is a miracle? Nothing more nor less than a contravention of the immutable laws of nature; an impossible feat got up to deceive and exploit the public and which deserves punishment instead of veneration.

At Fatima the clergy joining material gain with fanaticism, arranged an indecorous comedy which thousands rushed to view. It was an opera scene ridiculously presented, in which the poor ignorant ingenuous crowd were just tools, to bring about a collective suggestion of the appearance of the Virgin to three poor children trained for their part by the wily clergy.

As, if the declaration of the three poor little children to whom the Virgin appeared and spoke, but whom no one else in the crowd saw or heard, wasn't enough, they had to stage another farce in which the sun danced a fandango with the clouds.

Citizens! All this is a shameful attempt to drag our people back into superstition and ignorance. It is imperative that our authorities should put an end to such shameful spectacles.

We, however, must not expect the authorities to do all, and so be as those who, doing nothing for themselves, leave all to Divine Providence, and to whom is applicable the old maxim:

'Place your trust in the Virgin and see what a fall you'll get.'

Our best way to help the Government is by extensive propaganda, by which we will carry to our fellow citizens the bright light of Truth, of Reason, of Science, so convincing them that nothing can alter the laws of nature and that the so-called miracles are miserable humbugs which are intended to abuse their credulity (which is the daughter of ignorance) a little of which remains in all of us on account of centuries of clerical education.

We call on the professors in our schools and colleges to continue educating and instructing our children according to Rationalist principles and ideas, thereby freeing them from religious superstition and preparing the future generation for a happier, fuller life.

Let us all work together to liberate the minds of our fellow citizens who are still deluded so that soon a degrading imposture as that of Fatima will be an impossibility. Viva a Republica! Abaixo (down) a reacao! Viva a Liberdade!"

N.F.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF COMMUNISM

Sir,—For the information of Reg. Bishop (p.p. Editor, Soviet Publications), the "Ten Commandments of Communism" (see "Freethinker" August 24) was published in an article, "The Communist Education of Youth is the Principal Task of the Komsomol" in the Moscow magazine, "Bolshovik" December, 1946, issue. In view of the date of publication, Mr. Reg. Bishop's assertion that the "Ten Commandments" could not have been issued "in the last ten, certainly not in the last twenty years," seems rather strange. I would be extremely interested to know how the publishing of such an item in the "Freethinker"—which in my opinion is in the general line of Communist trends—could "do harm to the cause of British-Soviet relations."—Yours, etc.,

ICARUS III.

### THE FOUR GEORGES

Sir,—In "Acid Drops" (Dec. 7) you credit all four Georges with "a love of fat women . . . and immorality in general." This goes for George I, II and IV. But surely George III—the

most disastrous of all the four—was a model family man. As Byron says:

"He ever war'd with freedom and the free:  
Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,  
So that they utter'd the word 'liberty!' . . .  
I grant his household abstinence; I grant  
His neutral virtues, which most monarchs want;  
I know he was a constant consort; own  
He was a decent sire, and middling lord . . .  
And this was well for him, but not for those  
Millions who found him what oppression chose."

Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

## OBITUARY

### WILLIAM HENRY SISSON

It is with sincere sorrow we have to announce the death of William Henry Sisson, of Bolton, which took place on November 24, in his 71st year, after a long and painful illness. William Henry Sisson was one of the old guard and his activity in the Freethought Movement covers a long period of years. His heart and interest was in Freethought, and as Secretary to the local branch of the N.S.S. he carried on until his death. He never tired in helping the cause and when there was work to be done, with risks involved, whoever was missing, William Henry Sisson was sure to be there, with no thought of personal gain or popularity through loyally serving a Movement hated by Churches and Christians. To his surviving widow and family we offer sincere sympathy in their loss. The remains were cremated in the Manchester Crematorium on November 27, where a Secular Service was read by Mrs. M. A. McCall, of the Manchester Branch N.S.S.

R. H. R.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

### LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, December 16, 7 p.m., "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead." Debate aft. the Rev. J. F. MOZLEY, D.D. (Oxon), neg., Mr. A. D. HOWELL SMITH, B.A. (Cantab).

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., "Propaganda," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7 p.m., "Freethought in a Changing World," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Saturday, December 20, 7 p.m., "Brains Trust." Bring your questions, and friends.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 7 p.m., "Atheism—the New Approach," Mr. LAURENCE SMITH.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m., "Freethought Under Communism," Mr. HARRY McSHANE.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boars Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m. A Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., "Britain and Europe," Mrs. MARY SARAN.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., "Freewill and Freethought," Mr. J. V. SHORTT (Preston).

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Hall, Arcade, Pilgrim Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m., "The Freethinker and the Occult," Mr. JACK CLAYTON (Burnley).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m., "International Trade and the Far East," Mr. J. HARRISON, M.P.

# YOUR CHRISTMAS READING

WINTER ISSUE ON SALE NOW

## THINKER'S DIGEST

STIMULATING reading on science, religion, literature, and the arts, of particular interest to Freethinkers. Among the authors whose work is included in this issue are John Dewey, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prof. G. de Ruggiero, Dr. Gilbert Murray, Sir Henry Dale, Prof. T.H. Huxley, Dr. Edward Glover, Richard le Gallienne, Sir James Jeans, Alex Comfort, E. C. Bentley and Sir Arthur Smith Woodward.

**1s. net, by post 1s. 2d.**

*There are a few subscription vacancies.*

*Four issues 4s. 6d., post paid.*

At all Booksellers or direct from

**C. A. WATTS & CO. LTD.**

5 & 6 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4

## THE AGE OF REASON

By THOMAS PAINE

The book that has survived over a century of abuse and misrepresentation.

Includes a critical life and introduction by Chapman Cohen and a reproduction of a commemoration plaque subscribed by American soldiers in this country.

230 pages. Price, cloth, **3s.** Postage 3d.

## THE VATICAN POLICY in the SECOND WORLD WAR

By L. H. LEHMAN

F. A. Ridley in review: Dr. L. H. Lehman, a man of outstanding critical ability and "inside" knowledge of the ramifications of that arch-enemy in every sphere, the Roman Catholic Church.

Paper covers only, **1s. 3d.**, postage 1½d.

## FOR THE NEW YEAR

### Packet of Six Postcards of THOMAS PAINE

including Portrait,  
Views of Thetford,  
Paine's Grammar  
School, etc.

*9d. per packet, post free*

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

## ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING

By CHAPMAN COHEN

*Series Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4.*

*Essays include :—*

Christ and Christmas.

George Bernard Shaw and the N.S.S.

A Famous Witch Trial.

Christmas Trees and Tree Gods.

War and War Memorials.

The four vols. **10s. 6d.** post free.

Single vols. **2s. 6d.**, postage 2½d.

*If it is your practice to make presents at Christmas, why not give your friends an annual subscription of "THE FREETHINKER."*

*"THE FREETHINKER" will be sent every week for 12 months to any address on receipt of 17s.*

## GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

By CHAPMAN COHEN

A Criticism of Professors Huxley, Eddington, Jeans and Einstein, including a reply by Prof. Eddington.

3rd Edition. Cloth **3s. 6d.**, postage 2d.

*The above can be obtained from THE PIONEER PRESS, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1*