

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Christian Fallacies

WHEN one sets out to track down and expose Christian fallacies, there is no lack of material. We all know, for instance, the familiar experience of the evangelical Christian, who will save souls at all costs. So I was not deceived some time ago, when a very earnest preacher told me that if I would only appreciate the value of Communion with God, my outlook would be entirely altered. I did not doubt my friendly parson, in fact I thanked him, but I could not see how that change of opinion could occur. I did not doubt that he got comfort out of his religion, but then I get satisfaction out of setting religion on one side, I feel very comfortable without God, so both sides are level.

The only feeling I can depend on are my own feelings. I really cannot depend on others. As with feelings, so with wisdom. That also must be mine. I can no more use the other man's wisdom than I can use his face. The wisdom of any man must be his, if only by adoption.

Consider the kind of mental mixture one gets if one is not careful. The Freethinker is told over and over again, that he can never understand the Christian's position until he gets the Christian's experience, but to get this experience the Freethinker has to take it on trust, in the dark, so to speak, and I dislike framing ideas in the dark. To believe in God without knowing anything about him is acting in the dark. The Christian does not believe because of his experience, he experiences because he believes. I should be the last to doubt what has just been said, all sorts of things can happen if people believe long enough or deeply enough. Faith can do more than move mountains.

I repeat, faith may do many strange things. Every atheist knows that Faith needs no evidence that Jesus is watching over us, and many dupes of the Roman Catholic Church can believe that the Sun recently left its orbit and danced up and down. The Mohammedans can believe that their Prophet held direct converse with Allah. The African Magic man may perform all the things that the Roman Catholic claims.

I do not, as an atheist, deny the power of faith. I assert it. It can create, it can also destroy what it has created. I know that man can believe almost anything. It was man that created the gods, and afterwards got rid of them. The Christian often forgets that the main issue between the Believer and the Unbeliever does not arise from a difference of experiences but from a difference in the interpretation of experiences. Strictly speaking there is not the slightest difference between the Christian and the Atheist. Anatomically and physiologically they are the same, and what is true of their bodily structure, is equally true of the mental structure. No one has yet seriously held that a psychological axiom that holds good of a Christian does not hold good of a

Freethinker, although the significance of this fact is not always appreciated. The Freethinker and the Christian are both living in the same world, and there is not a feeling experienced by the Christian that is not also experienced by the Atheist. Mrs. Bitty always taught that a boil on the back of the neck is belief made manifest, but I may refute the interpretation without in the least denying the presence of the boil. So it is with Christian "experiences." The visions of the Saints were quite real—to them—but the question of their causation is another matter altogether. They may be authorities in the one instance, their word is quite worthless in the other. I do not doubt that after the Monk had tortured his body, and meditated on the wickedness of women, saw visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Nun, under similar circumstances, saw visions of Jesus holding out his arms to embrace her. I take that description of their experiences at their full face value, but when it comes to the interpretation of them, I venture to suggest that the suppressed and distorted sex feelings will explain all the visions.

If mere experience could have given us the truth of things, the history of intellectual development would have been very simple and straightforward, but it is our interpretation of experience that raises the many questions that are so fatal to the Christian religion. When the Gospel Jesus saw the insane and the epileptic, his experience could give him no other explanation but that the men and women were possessed of devils. We have exactly the same facts to-day, but instead of the ignorant thesis of the Christian figurehead we properly place insanity and epilepsy in the category of neural disorders. There is not the least difference in the comets that flash across the skies today, and those that our ancestors saw thousands of years ago, but we no longer interpret them as messengers from God, bring plague and pestilence as a punishment. It is a question of interpretation whether we regard phenomena as supernaturally caused, or we look for a more scientific explanation of what lies before us. Saint or Sinner, dipsomaniac or "mystic," science sweeps them all in the same net, and explains them by the same principles. Had the Gospel Jesus known what we know to-day concerning nervous disorders, he would not have tried to explain insanity by the demoniac possession theory. Here, as elsewhere, it is ignorance that is the forcing ground for religious conviction.

What has been said concerning the interpretation of insanity or disease as supernatural occurrences, is equally true concerning those emotions and feelings which are taken as evidences of the reality of religion. Broadly it may be said that all the alleged evidence of communion with God and from the comfort derived therefrom are so many misunderstandings of the social side of man's nature. Before all else Man is a social animal, he is not merely gregarious,

and that expression covers a very much wider and much more important truth. It is the virtue of the social factor that we may call civilisation goes on, that improvements to our social life are added little by little, that the experience of one generation is conserved in speech and writing and handed on for the benefit of the following generation. There is no other species of the higher animals that is so dependent upon the society of his fellows as is man. This is shown by the fact that if he is by any chance condemned to an absolutely solitary life, the purely and distinctive human characteristics weaken and disappear. The consequence of this is that man's emotional nature has always been developed with regard to others. He cannot help paying regard to others, however slight, since in this way he is ministering to some of the most imperative demands of his nature, and if we were to assume that each understood his own nature, the man of to-day would no more think of God in connection with the manifestation of his feelings than he does in connection with a case of insanity.

A large part of our education is designed to prevent us realising this self-knowledge. A child is filled with religious phrases that serve as a preparation of what is coming. At adolescence, when the social side of his nature begins to develop rapidly, and when he is reaching out to take part in the wider life of the race, he is taught to consider this as a yearning for some supernatural power. The desire for communion which has no meaning apart from the social life of the race, is twisted into a desire for communion with God. In a thousand and one different ways the adolescent's natural development is exploited in the interests of religious organisations. He is kept on the intellectual level of the savage, even though he may express himself in the most polished language. He misinterprets his experience because he is never permitted to understand it. This exploitation of human nature, in the interests of this or that religious system, represents a social wastage of no mean order. In practice it means that instead of human activities and energies being intelligently directed towards the betterment of life, they are squandered in the perpetuation of beliefs, prejudices and superstitions that are amongst some of the most difficult obstacles the reformer has to overcome. When the time comes for the weighing up of the evils that religion has inflicted upon the human race it is certain that this frustration of the human power for good will not be the lightest charge to be laid against religion.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### "THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC" FRAUD

AFTER hearing the final broadcast in the B.B.C. series of discussions entitled "Belief and Unbelief," I had to admire the artfulness with which the Christian managers of these talks had manoeuvred the carefully selected "unbelievers" into a losing position from which they never recovered. I have no hesitation in awarding the palm of victory in the series to the Christians, whose prepared strategy was much too good for their opponents who obviously had no concerted plan and were probably unaware that they were being made the victims of a cunning trap such as anyone with experience of religious controversy should have expected.

The first broadcast introduced the listening public to a type of unbeliever who went out of his way from the start to say how much he respected and accepted what, without any prompting, he called "the Christian ethic." This was not recognisably

defined, but the general idea was that all decency, kindness, honest dealing, unselfishness, loyalty, generosity, tolerance and any other human qualities usually considered creditable to the possessor could be thus described. To get this put forward and conceded in the first discussion was a triumph for the Christian side of the argument, and knowing what I do of past B.B.C. policy in the religious field I really cannot believe it to be merely co-incidental.

No unbeliever in subsequent talks took the trouble to restore the balance of the argument, so the Christian who summed up in the last broadcast was able to begin by saying that the most significant feature of the series had been the agreement by both sides on the superiority of "the Christian ethic." At such a stage it was useless for the unbeliever to make the declaration he did, to the effect that he believed in the social origin of morals, for this only made it appear that his was a minority opinion, even amongst unbelievers. The one way of turning the tables was for him to challenge the conclusion of the opener, deny the assumption that the speakers for unbelief were representative of the organised movement long established in the country and expose how the broadcasts had been stage-managed to secure a desired result which might hoodwink the public.

He failed to do so, and "belief" has come very well out of the ordeal, while "unbelief" has been made to appear of very little consequence. For, if all the good in the world is a result of "the Christian ethic" it is something worth believing in, and if one believes in the "Christian ethic" one ought to call oneself a Christian, and if enough people can be made to call themselves Christians there will be fewer to criticise the churches—a result not likely to displease the B.B.C. and its clerical friends.

The impudence and dishonesty of those who talk so glibly of "the Christian ethic" equals anything the defenders of religion have been guilty of in history. The thing is mere claptrap, but it has become the stock-in-trade not only of preachers in every pulpit, but of politicians who like to be reported as "making an impressive appeal to his fellow-countrymen to preserve the Christian way of life," and no freethinker should let it pass unchallenged.

The plain fact is that there is no specifically Christian ethic or way of life. It does not exist in the teachings of Jesus or the writings of his followers in the New Testament, or Christians would not have had the many causes they have found for differing and wrangling about the nature of right and wrong. It has never existed in any of the churches, or they would have found unity by now. The only meaning of "a Christian ethic" is something the churches have taught in relation to conduct, and this has varied enormously, accordingly as belief in the many Christian superstitions has waxed and waned.

When Christians believed that Christ would reappear shortly after his alleged ascension, "the Christian ethic" consisted in praying, fasting and the neglect of life's ordinary responsibilities. When they believed that their salvation depended on taking back the Holy Land from the unbelievers, "the Christian ethic" included no higher duty than that of taking part in or supporting the Crusades, with all their misery and bloodshed. When Christians believed that the existence of unbelief would displease their God, "the Christian ethic" encouraged the Inquisition and glorified in the tortures, the burnings and the injustices to which its victims were subjected. When it was believed that the Bible was the highest law, witch-hunting occupied an honoured place in "the Christian ethic." In my boyhood, "the Christian ethic" was much in evidence in a narrow Sabbatarianism and a hypocritical interference with all kinds of rational enjoyment. And to-day, according to "the Christian ethic" it is right to present to children in school, as unquestioned truths, religious teachings that the majority of informed adults have no hesitation in rejecting.

The changes in "the Christian ethic" can be seen in the B.B.C. even. Very recently it would broadcast nothing not in

conformity with the "main stream of Christianity." Now speakers may question the miraculous and even say they do not believe in a god; but, while doing so, they must not say a word against "the Christian ethic," and, if they are willing to be so far accommodating, it is a small step to saying that they admire it tremendously.

But how contemptible are both sides, when supposedly free and open discussions are thus staged!

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

## RELIGIOUS CONVULSIONS

**EXACTLY!** With all the synods and convocations that compose the religious circus of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Churches failure, the fact remains that unless they can convince or impart their "extraordinary" knowledge to those "ordinary intelligent readers with no special knowledge of biblical studies," then His Grace may just as well abandon altogether the religious gymnasium of words in company with his troupe of minstrels and come down to the simplicity of Jesus and have done with it.

It's no use for these leading lights of darkness to complain of their failures when all they need do is to tackle atheistical philosophy, and that's no easy task.

It may be they have learned in time that to overwork the brain cells is to become pusillanimous through phosphorus waste, and much prefer to remain in the safe path of "belief" rather than the unsafe path of "knowledge."

But should they step towards scepticism or doubt like Bishop E. W. Barnes, then the idea is likely to spread, if not checked, like the boisterous rags of university students, and probably the whole gang would be in danger of being sent down for effective punishment, as the aged and respected Bishop is now threatened with for his schism.

But don't think this sort of thing is new in the Church's crisis, because that master critic and scholar Mr. Joseph McCabe has told us how in the year of grace, 1923, the Archbishop of Canterbury at that time appointed, mind you, 25 of the most learned theologians to his seat at Lambeth Palace, just opposite St. Thomas's Hospital, London, for the purpose of modernising or rather attempting to correct all those troublesome parts of Christian doctrine, and took 15 long weary years of their synodical chattering only to meet with successful failure. Ultimately, and with bowed heads, they left that uncomfortable seat of His Grace for their more comfortable seats at home; but if before doing so they had for the sake of unity crossed the road into the hospital opposite, I'm sure a fresh young team of students would have been able to have convinced them that 15 years searching for a cure without success was something of a task to be reckoned with; they may have pointed out too, that though the phenomenon of "Spirit" is material enough in print or expression, it is nevertheless too evasive to be diagnosed in laboratory research, and therefore void in any curative form if spirit is the trouble. In short, it would have been as much as to say, if you are all bankrupt, join us in real hospital work for we would be most grateful in face of the fact that there are so many earthly diseases to contend with, not to mention the laborious task left entirely to those few specialists and their overworked staff who devote their humanitarian duties to alleviate the torturous sufferings of mankind including your troubled selves, that real co-operation between all men and women seems more suited to economic considerations rather than ecclesiastical ones.

What with that colossal failure so many years ago, and now the Barnes bombshell together with the clerical calamities that are being blazoned in our royalist newspapers is just too bad. It must stop. I propose to ban them, for they are making it appear that the clergy from top to bottom are no more than flesh and

bone of all things; whilst medical students delight in their anthropological studies in comparative anatomy in order to see the remarkable similarity to lower brutes including man.

Life is relatively a paradox.

Parsons seem to be getting more earthly than ever. One unsympathetic newspaper is not satisfied until it tells of the bigamous exploits of Padre Harry Lamb; but the Lord being his shepherd he does not want for friends I can assure you, for the editor of the "Isle of Man Times" mentioned the Hon. Mary Strickland, owner of the "Malta Times" as saying, "If ever there was a man who should have a statue in Malta erected to him it was Harry," and when I pointed my finger to this noble gesture to my Fleet Street friends, they insolently roared with laughter, adding insult to injury by suggesting that if the Hon. Mary had had more knowledge of the significance of phallic worship, an obelisk would have been far more suitable to the memory of Harry's doings in Malta, that place of bells and smells.

Instead, poor Harry has been cruelly cast into jail for 18 long months with that true Christian Mr. Justice Lewis's quiet words ringing in his ears that he hesitated as to whether or not he ought to have sent him to penal servitude. Very well; if padre Harry has fallen from grace, let's hope those somewhat restricted months will soon pass when he can once again fall into the more graceful arms of his two Christian wives.

The next so-called newspaper that I mark down for condemnation is a Sunday publication and I seem to discern sheer jealousy here, and all because the Reverend Richard Clough having apparently more money than sense was tempted by the devil to suffer the "Goodbyes" and "Bon Voyages" of his parishioners to fly through the clouds to New Zealand.

Now whether he had the doldrums through the seclusions of Devonshire, or thought that while he possesses over 7,000 "necas," as I've heard the £ disgustingly described, he may as well get a kick out of them before passing out of this wealthy life, I don't know; and I'm sure he didn't know either, how to obtain exact information before losing so much for so little, and of course even parsons lose their tempers and get annoyed when being bothered with unreligious excise duties and I don't blame them. In any case, he quite innocently thought he could plonk his worldly goods without being breeched into a better land than Yarecombe in dear old Devon and thereby learned one more earthly lesson that it's a far far better thing he has done now to return to tend his flock in spite of his conscience being reminded that during his absence there was no material shepherd willing to even occupy his vicarage on the paltry stipend of £405 per year, so hence Richard may in future explain in the pulpit that the gates of heavenly Devon were kept open especially for him to return through in order to point out to his parishioners in the nick of time that his expedition was the Lord's method of redirecting his ministerial labour, that he may speak with first-hand knowledge that devils still exist in New Zealand, as elsewhere.

I repeat, the Church has nothing to hide and we are continually emphasising that we have done those things we ought not to have done, and we shall go on doing it. But we shall not tolerate Bishop Barnes for his misdemeanours and consider that the Head Master in justice to the Church's foundation has rightly appointed a stalwart who is as blunt as his name to remove that part of the frock for the whipping he so rightly deserves.

TIMOTHY THOMAS.

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## ACID DROPS

What are Christian Ethics? Robert Greenwood Tarran, a big and well-known industrialist, was found guilty of compiling and publishing a false balance sheet. He was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. Is the crime and sentence part of Christian Ethics? Tarran was Vicar's Warden at St. John's Church, Newland, and was actually re-appointed during the court proceedings. He was also a close friend of the late Archbishop of Canterbury, and boasted that wherever he was he had a few minutes prayer and meditation every morning. He will now have plenty of time during the next nine months for prayer and meditation, and talks with the prison chaplain on "Christian Ethics."

Our sympathy goes out to the sorrowing families of the 165 fishermen drowned in a sudden storm off the north coast of Portugal. Grief, deep and sincere, in the face of such loss raises the quality and character of humanity. As some of the dead bodies were washed ashore a number of women crawled on their knees behind patron saint symbols. Such a scene would be pleasing to the priest; it tells of his work well done, but on the other hand it reveals the degrading influence of priests and Christianity upon civilised human beings.

It is an interesting fact that there is no such thing as an insane Atheist. We do not mean by this that an Atheist does not go insane. They do. We have always remembered the remark of the famous Oliver Wendell Holmes that every man who wishes to be looked upon with respect ought to go insane occasionally just to show that he has brains—and uses them. Certainly we may take all cases of insanity as evidence that the person has brains, and has strained them to breaking point. Sheer dullness may protect brains, and will keep many out of an asylum, but is it worth it? We have often reflected on Oliver Wendell Holmes and his respect for lunatics in the light of some of the people we run across. What we mean then is that insane people do not proclaim themselves Atheists. This should set some religionists thinking.

The Reverend Walter Wynn is a strong supporter of Sunday Cinemas and other entertainments. His support takes the view that we have always held when he says that, "I know what happens when girls are left to find their amusement on the streets or out in the lanes." This appreciation of the young people may not be very high, but the fact remains. We do, however, congratulate the Rev. Walter Wynn, who seems to be more progressive than the usual run of the clergy who are more concerned with their own status in life rather than the social life of others.

Our readers will be interested to know that "an Army of Church men" are on the march, determined to collect £400,000 to "keep up the present work of the Churches." This is not a very attractive method of raking in the money. Many of our older preachers had a more effective way. One leading preacher always refused to ask for money. He would advertise as widely as possible that a certain amount was wanted. No one was to be asked for it. God was left to move people. Sure enough God sent the money—through his believers, who would not let the Lord down. A good game.

The evil influence of religion is particularly prominent when Negro and Whites are involved. An example of this antipathy between the two colours comes from Georgia, U.S.A., where negroes are banned from various churches and schools. But surely they are all Christians and have the same "Father?"

The Bishop of Gloucester is a man of great imagination. For example, he imagines that he received a "call" from God to become a minister—with a comfortable salary—and since that call he imagines that he is peculiarly fitted to prepare people for some future eternal state, in which they would remain happily for ever. The strength of the Bishop's case is, of course, that no one can tell us of this future state or even whether the Bishop received a "call." It is really the operation of the "confidence trick" that has landed many a man in prison.

The Archbishop of York laments the shortage of potatoes; he says it will mean hardship for all. Pity that when Jesus was on earth he did not ordain that such things as bad harvests should not happen. For those who thirst after more knowledge of one who could have done more on earth if he would, but didn't, apply to the Roman Catholic Church.

Which reminds us of some of the things he did do. For instance, Jesus' mother had a husband. We put it that way because the husband was not the father of Jesus. The husband was a carpenter who found one day that the article he was shaping was not long enough. But Jesus was equal to the task. He said to the husband of his mother: "Fear not, neither be cast down. Do thou lay hold of one side and I the other, and we will stretch it to its just dimensions"; and it came about. This is something worth remembering and should be very useful in these days of shortages.

In a recent issue of the "The Listener," the Bishop of Gloucester says that from the beginning of the B.B.C. it has been the "aim of those who have directed the policy of the B.B.C. to be true to their high calling as Ministers of God, and to use this instrument which has been placed in their hands, and not to be unworthy of the source from which it had its origin. They have desired above everything that the programmes broadcast day by day shall be an uplifting and not a degrading force in the life of the nation." To the average man that curious story may sound well, but to those who have followed the course of the B.B.C. it is, to put it plainly—bosh! To say that the aim of the B.B.C. was to secure the Ministers of God is not true. Quite a number of those who strove to perfect the new power of broadcasting were not saturated with religion, in fact, a large proportion were not even Christians. Many were Freethinkers whose interest was to develop broadcasting; religion simply did not enter the scheme of things. As a matter of fact many opposed religion.

To put it briefly, many of the early workers on the B.B.C., some of them Freethinkers, desired to have Sunday broadcasting. This would be bound to upset the Churches. It was, therefore, suggested that as a cover for ordinary Sunday entertainments, the Churches be invited to broadcast programmes of religious music. So little faith had the Churches in the value of broadcasting on Sunday that an attempt was made to ban Sunday broadcasting altogether. It was thought that Sunday on the air would lure people away from the Church. As a matter of fact, it had no such result; people went to Church as usual—with the number of attendances steadily getting thinner. It was after that experience that the Churches thought they could make good their losses through the publicity of the B.B.C. The idea that the Churches were working for the B.B.C. is nonsense. The Church is out to get, not give.

It was at this point that that religious bigot, Sir John Reith, made his appearance and religion appeared more and more over the air. It was an established rule that because the voice of the B.B.C. entered the cottages of the uneducated and the illiterate, nothing was to be said that might shock the religious susceptibilities. Nothing was to be permitted that would break the "Christian Tradition." That was an apology to us, but we could never find out what the "Christian Tradition" was. That the same policy is being kept up to-day is evidenced by the recent so-called Discussions.

Not for the first time has a Christian sent us a long account of how we could find God. What bothers us is that if we found Him we would not know what to do with Him—or it. We cannot see that anyone who walks with God can know more than the man who never bothers his head about Him. One thinks of the Greek prince who told his teacher that when he grew up he would conquer the whole world. "Good," said the teacher, "but when you have conquered the world, what then?" The student replied, "Then I shall come home and rest." "Well," said the teacher, "why not do that first." This Christian should reflect that all he can get by expending energy running after God we can get with ease and profit without making oneself a fool.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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We regret that no more of our special Christmas cards are available.

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

The Executive of the N.S.S. is always ready to send speakers to outside organisations to put the Freethought position before members. In that connection Mr. J. Barker of the Kingston Branch N.S.S. met members of the Brixton Branch F.L.P. on December 11th, and on the subject of "The Role of Freethought in the Modern World," opened an interesting discussion which seemed to have provided a useful evening well spent. Misconceptions of Freethought are very common and an exchange of opinions with actual Freethinkers is the best remedy. Invitations for speakers can be sent to the General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.

A new reader of "The Freethinker" asks why is it that the Press generally ignore the Freethought Movements. We could easily write a book on that subject, but will content ourselves with a sentence. Freethought is the last thing that the Press will permit in its columns. "The Freethinker" has been before the public over sixty years, and we submit that for quality it ranks with any other paper in the country.

We note that Sir Percy Carter Buck, late organist for Bristol Cathedral, has died. He was cremated according to his wish, and stipulated that there should be no religious service of any kind at his funeral. It looks as if Sir Percy had seen enough of religion to have done with it. If only those who are non-Christian would openly avow it, what a change there would be. The worst feature of Christianity is not that it deludes people but that it makes humbugs of them. Consider the number who describe themselves as this or that instead of just plain Atheists. They may not have the slightest belief in God, and if they are intelligent they will know how the gods were born and how they die. But when they meet the Christian arguments with, "of course we do not deny the existence of God, we merely suspend judgment," we feel sure that the opinion of the real Christian on such evasive arguments is not very high.

Southend, that town of fun and games, and which is certainly not noted for its learning and solemnity, has a Mayor who asserts that cinemas should not be allowed to open longer than from 7 to 10. He is of the opinion that it is disgraceful that the cinemas should be open for more than half the day, and people attending them, even to shelter out of the rain, are breaking the Sabbath. We are grateful to the Mayor for giving us a glimpse of what the world would be if the particular brand of Christianity which the Mayor holds, were in power.

## PAGES FROM VOLTAIRE

COUNT BOULAINVILLIER'S DINNER PARTY  
(1767)

### First Conversation.—Before Dinner

ABBE COUET: Then it is your belief, Sir, that philosophy is quite as useful to the human race as is our Apostolic, Catholic, and Roman religion.

COUNT BOULAINVILLIERS: Philosophy embraces the whole universe, our religion dominates only a part of Europe: yet it has many enemies. But you must admit that philosophy is a thousand times more salutary than our religion, such as it has been practised for ages.

COUET: You astonish me. What, then, do you understand by philosophy?

THE COUNT: I understand by it the enlightened love of wisdom, sustained by the love of the Eternal Being, the rewarder of virtue and the punisher of crime.

COUET: Just so! But is not that precisely what our religion teaches?

THE COUNT: If that be the basis of our religion, we have nothing to argue about: I am a good Catholic, and you are a good philosopher, and neither of us is likely to go a step further than the other. Let us not dishonour our religious and holy philosophy by sophisms and absurdities which are an outrage upon our reason, or by an insensate avarice for the honours and wealth which corrupt all our virtues. Let us give ear to the truths and moderation of philosophy; and then this philosophy will adopt religion as a daughter.

COUET: With your permission, I must object that your words smell somewhat of the stake.

THE COUNT: So long as you continue to talk about stakes, and use the argument of burning instead of that of reason you will have only hypocrites and fools for partisans. The opinion of one wise man is worth more than the smart fallacies of knaves, or the admonition of fools. You have asked me what I mean by philosophy; I ask you in return, what you mean by religion?

COUET: It would take me a long time to explain to you all our dogmas.

THE COUNT: That itself is a presumption against you. You need *folios*; I want only four words: *Serve God, do good.*

COUET: Our religion has never said anything contrary.

THE COUNT: I should be glad not to find contrary ideas in your books. Those cruel words: "Compel them to come in,"\* words which you abuse in such a barbarous fashion; and these: "I came not to send peace, but a sword";† and, again: "If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen or a publican";‡ and a hundred similar sayings all equally terrifying to the common sense of humanity. Could there be anything harder and more hateful than that other saying: "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand"?§ In this manner do eternal wisdom and goodness speak to us?

The God of the whole universe who was made flesh in order to bring light and blessings to man, is it possible that he could say: "I am sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel"¶ that is, to the people of a tiny country some twenty leagues in extent. It is possible that this God to whom tribute money was to be paid, should have told his disciples that they must pay no tribute; that the kings§ "take tribute only from strangers, and that the children are free"?

COUET: These sayings that scandalise you so much are to be explained by quite different passages.

\* Luke xiv. 23.

¶ Matthew xiii. 13.

† Matthew x. 34.

‡ Matthew xv. 24.

‡ Matthew xviii. 17.

§ *Ibid.*, xvii. 24-26.

THE COUNT: But what are we to think of a God who stands in need of a commentary, who is always making contradictory statements? What of a law-giver who has committed nothing to writing? What of your sacred books, the dates of whose authors are unknown, and who give the lie to each other on every page?

COUNT: I must impress upon you that all things are harmonized. But you will at least admit that you have no fault to find with the Sermon on the Mount?

THE COUNT: Oh, certainly! We are told that Jesus said "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire,"† this, at least, has been accepted literally by your theologians. He says that he is come to fulfil the law of Moses,§ a dispensation hateful to you. He asks wherewith the earth shall be salted if the salt has lost its savour.¶ He says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."¶ I am aware, moreover, that he is made to exclaim that the grain of wheat is not quickened except it die,\*\* that the kingdom of heaven is a grain of mustard seed;‡ that it is money put out at interest;‡‡ that when a feast is made only the poor should be invited.§§ It may be that these expressions had a respectable meaning in the language in which they are said to have been uttered; I am willing to adopt everything that inspires virtue; but I shall be glad to know what you think of another passage which is this: "It is God who has formed me; God is everywhere, and within me. Shall I dare to pollute him by criminal and base actions, by impure words and desires? In the hour of death, can I say to God: 'O my master and father' it was thy will that I should suffer, I have suffered with a will resigned. I have embraced poverty: thou hast placed me in a humble position, and I have not wished for greatness; it is thy will that I should die, and dying I adore thee. I depart from this magnificent spectacle giving thanks to thee for granting me to behold the wonderful order in this thy ruling of the universe."‡‡

COUNT: That is admirable; in what father of the Church did you find so divine a passage? Was it in Saint Cyprian, in St. Gregory of Nazianzen, or in Saint Cyril?

THE COUNT: No; these are the words of a Pagan slave, called Epictetus, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius thought in a like manner with the Greek slave.

COUNT: I remember that I read, in my youth, the moral precepts of the Pagan writers, which made a profound impression upon me. I even admit that the laws of Zaleucos, or of Charondas, the teachings of Confucius, the moral commandments of Zoroaster, the maxims of Pythagoras, appear to me to be dictated by wisdom for the happiness of the human race; it would appear that God deigned to honour these men with an intelligence brighter than that given to ordinary mortals, just as he gave more of harmony to Virgil, more of eloquence to Cicero, and more of wisdom to Archimedes, than to their contemporaries. I was impressed by the wonderful lessons in virtue bequeathed to us by antiquity. But to come to my point, all these men knew nothing at all of theology. They knew not the difference between cherubim and seraphim, between efficient and sufficient grace; they knew not that God was dead; that, having been crucified for all men, he had yet been crucified only for a few. Ah! my dear sir, if Cicero, Epictetus, Cato, and Marcus Aurelius had known that the son was born of the father and yet not born of him; that the spirit was neither born nor created, but that he proceeds by inspiration sometimes from the father, sometimes from the son; that the son has all that belongs to the father except the paternity; if, I say, the ancients, our masters in all things, had known a hundred truths with this clearness and force—in fact, if they had been theologians—what blessings would not they have bestowed on mankind? Con-

substantiation and transubstantiation, my dear sir, are noble conceptions. If only Scipio, Cicero, and Marcus Aurelius had got to the bottom of these truths, they would have been Vicars-General to the Archbishop or syndics of the Sorbonne.

THE COUNT: So, so! But tell me frankly, between ourselves and in the sight of God, if you think that the souls of these great men are on the spit, toasted by devils for all eternity, while they await the arrival of their bodies, which are to be burnt for all time with them, simply because they could not be syndics of the Sorbonne or Vicars-General to an Archbishop?

COUNT: You put me in a difficulty; for "outside the Church there is no salvation."

*Nul ne doit plaire au ciel que nous et nos amis.\** Whoever "neglects to hear the Church let him be to thee as an heathen or a publican." Scipio and Marcus Aurelius did not hear the Church; they did not recognise the Council of Trent; their souls will burn for ever, and when their bodies, scattered to the four elements, shall be brought together again, they will be burnt also. Nothing is clearer, nothing more fitting: there is no doubt about it.

On the other hand, it is very harsh to burn eternally Socrates, Aristides, Pythagoras, Epictetus, the Antonines, all those whose lives were pure and worthy of our imitation, and to grant eternal felicity to the soul and body of Ravallac,† who died a good Christian, absolved of all his sins, and provided with grace efficient and sufficient. I confess to some difficulty here, for, in fact, I am the judge of all men; their eternal happiness or unhappiness depends on me. I should certainly have some repugnance in saving Ravallac and damning Scipio.

There is, however, one thing that consoles me; it is that we other theologians can get our friends out of hell if we have a mind to. We read in the *Acts* of Saint Thecla, a great theologian, a disciple of Saint Paul, who disguised herself as a man in order to follow him, that she delivered from hell her friend Falconilla, who had the misfortune to die a Pagan.‡

The great St. John of Damascus tells us that the great Saint Macarius, the same who obtained from God by fervent prayer the death of Arius, one day questioned in a cemetery the skull of a Pagan on this very subject. The skull replied that the prayers of the theologians lessened the sufferings of the damned.§

As a matter of fact, we know without a shadow of a doubt that Pope Gregory the Great delivered from hell the soul of the Emperor Trajan. These are striking examples of God's mercy.

THE COUNT: You are an amusing fellow. Oblige me, then, and deliver from hell, by your holy prayers, the great Henry IV, who died without the sacrament, like a Pagan, and put him in heaven with Ravallac who made a good confession; but, for my part, I find it difficult to imagine how they could exist in the same place, and how they would regard each other.

THE COUNTESS OF BOULAINVILLIERS: Dinner is getting cold; here is Mr. Freret, who has just arrived. Please let us sit down at once, and after dinner you shall deliver from hell whom you like.

Englished by GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

\* None is pleasing in the sight of heaven but us and our friends.  
† A Jesuit who murdered Henry IV, the most enlightened monarch Europe has ever seen.

‡ John of Damascus. *Orat. de iis qui in pace dormierunt*, p. 585.

§ In Grabe, *Spicilegium*, vol. i.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### PSYCHICAL OR PHYSICAL?

Sir,—The observations by F. Kenyon under the title "A Striking Element" ("The Freethinker," November 30), call, without doubt, be explained rationally and as he states, call not for psychical investigation but for explanation by a physicist.

† Matthew v. 22.

§ *Ibid.*, v. 17.

¶ *Ibid.*, v. 13.

¶ *Ibid.*, v. 3.

\*\* 1 Cor. xv. 36.

‡‡ Luke xiii. 19.

‡‡ Matthew xxv. 27.

§§ Luke xiv. 12.

It is also true that certain well-known scientists prefer to express themselves as obscurantists rather than as rationalists, but whilst the existing social system encourages such trends it is natural to assume that even people eminent in their own field will resort to irrationalism when they have come to the end of all progress. Such trends would be suppressed in the Soviet Union where, of course, there is no need for anti-scientific trends which fact may be interpreted in certain quarters as a loss of freedom. However, many people think otherwise.

With regard to the mysterious piano it is obvious that:—

- (1) The damper action is faulty thus permitting resonance on certain notes. This may easily occur in an old piano.
- (2) The note, or a number of notes, resonates to external vibrations transmitted to the piano. These vibrations need not be audible.

A favourite illusion in the old magic-theatre was the self-playing harp. A harp is seen on the stage apparently playing itself. A second harp was concealed under the stage and the sound transmitted through a vertical post leading up through the stage to the base of the first harp. On playing the concealed harp the one in full view of the audience followed the sequence exactly. To complete the illusion, at the end of the performance the harp was carried off the stage in full view of the audience thus showing that there were no electrical connections or rigging to the instrument.

In the case of the "mysterious" piano, the sounds are transmitted to the piano from the outside. No electric vibrators or any concealed apparatus is necessary. One of the supports of the piano stands on a continuous wooden conductor (it will be found if it is looked for), this conducting the vibrations from some external source to the piano. A very clever trick if done skillfully, but no more mysterious than would deceive any matriculation student.—Yours, etc.,

T. D. SMITH, B.Sc.

#### MR. G. BERNARD SHAW AND MRS. BESANT.

Sir,—May I be allowed a word in reply to Mr. George Bernard Shaw's brilliant analysis of Mrs. Besant? Though writing from memory, it was not "conjecture" when I said that it was Mr. Stead who gave Mrs. Besant the two volumes of "The Secret Doctrine" for review. Here are her own words from her "Autobiography" published in 1893:—

"At last [in 1889], sitting alone in deep thought . . . I heard a voice that was later to become to me the holiest sound on earth—bidding me to take courage, for the Light was near. A fortnight passed, and then Mr. Stead gave into my hands two large volumes. 'Can you review these? My young men all fight shy of them, but you are quite mad enough on these subjects to make something of them.' I took the books; they were the two volumes of 'The Secret Doctrine,' by H. P. Blavatsky. Home I carried my burden, and sat me down to read."

Moreover, whatever were the causes of Mrs. Besant's poverty her adherence to Socialism was not one of them. She never ceased to write for "The National Reformer" until she finally broke with Bradlaugh over Theosophy in 1889. Though Bradlaugh strongly opposed Socialism he always allowed Mrs. Besant a free hand—and even permitted her to advertise her books on Socialism in his paper. He was always a great Freethinker. As for the National Secular Society, Mrs. Besant continued to lecture on its platform from 1884 when she became a Socialist until her resignation in 1889. In fact, Mr. G. W. Foote bitterly complained that "she advocated Socialism in Secular halls, but not that 'she advocated Socialism in Secular meeting places. Hundreds of Freethinkers said the same thing. . . ." Mrs. Besant wrote a review of "The Secret Doctrine" for "The National Reformer" in 1889, and she spoke on Theosophy at the Hall of Science for the National Secular Society in the same year. Thus Mrs. Besant's Socialism never stood in her way with the Freethought Party, and her break came only when she throw over everything in Freethought she had hitherto so stoutly championed.

For the rest, we must all heartily agree with Mr. Shaw that Mrs. Besant loved to have a "leading" man with whom she could perform her new "play." She even "staged" her defence of the unsavoury Mr. Leadbeater.—Yours, etc., H. CUTNER.

## OBITUARY

### HARRY BURY

The West Ham Branch N.S.S. has lost one of its oldest and most sincere members by the death of Harry Bury which took place on December 7th, in his 63rd year. He was a man of outstanding character and courage. Sadly afflicted with eye-sight trouble which handicapped him all through his life he nevertheless determined to take his place as a useful member of society. He read well, worked well, thought rationally and his active membership in the West Ham Branch must reach nearly 40 years. "The Freethinker" was his weekly treat during the whole time. Nobody ever asked in vain for help from Harry Bury and it was a feature of the man that the troubles of others concerned him as much as his own. His remains were interred in Queens Road Cemetery, Walthamstow, London, on December 12th, where before a large assembly of relatives and friends, including members of the West Ham Branch N.S.S., a secular Service was read by the General Secretary, N.S.S.

R.H.R.

### HENRY THOMAS GALE

In deep sympathy we announce the death of Henry Thomas Gale of Six Bells, Abertillery, which took place on December 4th, at the age of 77 years after two months of acute suffering from cancer. A staunch Freethinker all through his life which was guided by Freethought principles which he retained to the very last. Almost his last words were to ensure that he had a Secular Service at his interment. He survived his wife, also a very sincere Freethinker, just two years. The funeral took place on Monday, December 8th, when before relatives and friends, many of the latter of 40 years' standing, a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. J. S. Wilde, Secretary of the Cardiff 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

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "From Idolatry to Reality," Mr. J. HUTTON HYNDS (Leader, St. Louis Ethical Society).

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurio Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: "A Bishop Looks for Jesus," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Philosophy of Egoism," Mr. W. EGAN.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: "The Walls of Jericho," Mr. ARTHUR CORLAND.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boars Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Treatment of the Criminal," Mr. G. F. GOODMAN (Chief of Police, Halifax).

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Children's Party.

Marseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Personality of Man," Mr. H. G. GARRETT.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Socialism and Literature," Mrs. D. PURCELL.

WOMAN SECRETARY wants comfortable board residence, (otherwise cooking facilities). Write Box 102.

## A DATE WITH LIFE !

TO see parents proudly parading prams! To see mothers-to-be confidently informing the world that the Stream of Life still flows, and they are the channels. That Faith in the future still exists; that hope is not gone from this land of ours. What encouraging thoughts in discouraging times. For if women took heed of all advice against children a man may well reflect that he would not be here; his mother, a sterile acid spinster, and if he asks what life holds now that he is in possession let him consider the rewards together with the hardships. The beauty of the land and sea, the sky by day and night. If he is aware, nature in all her moods will fill him with the joy of living. The joy of battle; not, in these less war-like days, of daily combat, but with a ball or piece of chess. The pleasure of good food and drink; the love of women. The enchantment of a book, of music, theatre, film. An endless range of life's delights are laid before him.

Difficulties, it is said, are made to be overcome. Let pleasure be found in their defeat. Accept each hardship as a challenge and rise to meet it. To shrink from life, to withdraw because it is too hard! Man is a coward who does so. He is alive, but dead! Let him conclude the chapter of his life.

Remember, there is no god! We are risen from the beasts, we are a branch of life and perforce obey her laws. Whilst guiding Nature, we cannot govern her, for to erase our passions is to erase ourselves nationally and individually. Let a nation only so order its affairs that Life is controlled; let the birthrate fall, and see another country, where the Life Stream runs in flood, fall on that poor decadent land erasing it from the face of the earth.

Mayhap one day, with a world entirely one, with similar principles of thought and education, it may be possible to govern nature—and live, but now, to-day, in this year of Grace ( ), nineteen hundred and forty-seven, let us acknowledge the Mastery of Life. Let us be men and live. Grasp hard of the nettles of nature and heave out our difficulties by the roots. Take pleasure in all things and achieve what we may. So shall we show the faith in ourselves. So shall we exert our superiority; let each man and each nation strive to be the best, and banish utterly those false gods of fear for the future. Greed for the present and that selfishness which prompts us to find reasons for killing Life so that we may live!

DAVID MOORE.

## THE NUDIST CULT AND CHRISTIANITY

A TREMENDOUSLY popular feature belonging to that enterprising monthly magazine "Health & Efficiency" is the "Brains Trust" forum, which has proved so entertaining and interesting that correspondence coming in from all over the world not only supports it but continues to form the edifice upon which the discussion group concerned build up this feature.

All sorts of questions are dealt with and I am pleased to note that the October issue of this magazine, now on the bookstalls, tackles the thorny problem of the religious element in the nudist sphere.

As the questions are so interesting, it is quite worthwhile providing you with a copy of them and I accordingly set them out exactly as printed.

QUESTION-MASTER: "We'll start off with a curious question from S.H. of York: 'Do nudist camps attract non-Christians more than Christians?'"

MR. N.D.: "Curious is right! What on earth does he (or she) mean? Is the inquirer assuming that nudists are wicked people, and that's why they congregate at nudist camps? As far as I know, people of all religions patronise naturist amenities."

Miss A.G.: "Perhaps like myself, the questioner feels that communal nudity is un-Christian—that the exposure of all the naked body in public life is against all precepts of modesty. Modesty, don't forget, is classed as a virtue."

Mrs. J.Y. "Ah! Now we come again upon that rather moth-eaten argument about modesty! Isn't modesty largely a question of the fashion and customs of to-day? If one wants to quote biblical texts, as critics sometimes do, one must remember that such references apply only to the convention of the bygone time when they were written. Even so, I can't bring to mind any quotation that questions the purity of the God-given human form. Real immodesty is a matter of intent. A fully-dressed female can, by various means, suggest immodesty. A beautiful naked form, can typify all that is best in creation. Going naked, or otherwise, has nothing to do with a person's morals, though it might conceivably be discouraged by certain religions."

Miss C.C.: "The one way of being truly immodest is to make a pretence of dress—to wear voluminous clothing, but by posture or action reveal enticing glimpses of bare flesh or underwear. This is the familiar 'strip-tease' technique, which originated with the over-dressed Can-Can girls of last century. It was they who pleasurable shocked their admirers by high-kicking revelations of lacy knickers, bare thighs, and suspenders. These entertainers exposed only a fraction of their bodies as compared with the stage dancer of to-day, or even her out-door sister—yet the Can-Can dance still remains the most outrageously immodest display on record."

QUESTION-MASTER: "Well, though we've departed a little from the question, the opinions we've heard this morning are very interesting. Now here's a question passed on to me by our reporter. It is: 'Does the practice of Naturism do away with social shyness?'"

Many other questions of profoundly interesting nature are dealt with, but I have told you all that has been said so far upon our phase. This vein of thought leads us to wonder if there is in the cult of healthy nudism, something more than what would appear to be, in the face of these things. As far as I am concerned I am all for cultivating nudism amongst the sexes, believing as I do that a few sessions spent in a naturist camp where sex is so obvious and commonplace, soon brings a lack of interest, undoubtedly leading the men and women concerned to behave in a purely natural way. After all as a freethinker, I try and cultivate a very open mind, and feel sure that in these days of social emancipation there should be nothing to prevent healthy naturism from growing, and in growing to produce healthy minds and sounder bodies, better equipped to tackle and take a dominant share in ridding the world of so much religious bunkum, hypocrisy and superstition. E. H. SIMPSON.

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