

# THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### There Are Others

IT seems one of the most difficult things in the world to get Christians to recognise the existence of others. At first glance this seems an extravagant statement, since one would imagine that the existence of non-Christians was too obvious to be ignored. In a sense, this is so. Christians will admit the fact even while they deplore it. But the great bulk of believers, having made the admission, appear to consider that their duty in this respect has been fully discharged. When they come to consider the value of proposed measures before Parliament, or discuss any subject of social consequence, the argument is conducted, very largely, as though Christians were the only people that needed consideration, and the bearing of legislation on the Christian religion the really important point at issue. Under pressure, it is admitted there are others; but straightway their existence is ignored.

Take, as an illustration, the education question. This is constantly discussed among Christians as though the whole of the problem was how to secure a working agreement between the sects. I admit this is a problem, and if it could be secured there would be little chance of any other claims receiving consideration. Fortunately, the conflicting claims of the sects cannot be adjusted for any length of time, and so others are secured against a larger measure of injustice than would otherwise be the case. But how often does it dawn upon these people that there are others besides Christians to be considered? The modern civilised State is not a Christian State in any genuine sense. It is made up of all sorts of religious believers, with all sorts of creeds, and a large and growing number of unbelievers. And you cannot possibly satisfy sectarian demands for privileged treatment without inflicting injustice upon those who are outside the sects. For, in the modern State, even the Christian believers, as a whole, represent nothing but a sect. This is a consideration that few Christians bear steadily in mind.

It is the same with the Sunday question. Christians demand, and feel morally injured if the demand is not granted, that nothing shall be done on that day that "outrages" the feelings of believers. They do not say nowadays that you must go to church, but they do say that you must do nothing on that day that hurts their feelings. It is exactly the same with Sunday concerts, Sunday excursions, and Sunday picture shows. No one should be allowed to say or do anything that displeases the Christian. He lives under the stupid delusion that the modern State is a Christian society that must be controlled in strict accordance with what he calls Christian principles. He does not always say this in so many words, but the idea is there all the same. He does not realise that the

only rational basis for the modern State is to ignore these sectarian differences and deal with the people on the basis of a common social life. He forgets, in short, that there are others.

In this matter, the Christian suffers from a very bad heredity. He has had it all his own way for so long, that he naturally finds it difficult to realise any radical change in the situation. He is in the position of a spoilt child who has never known what it is to have a wish refused, and who has seen the whole household arranged to suit his whims. The average Christian is not living in the modern State at all. Mentally, he is still living in the Middle Ages, when society was deliberately organised, so far as was possible, with reference to the maintenance of Christian doctrine, however much the doctrines might change from time to time. He simply cannot understand that society is, with increasing rapidity, freeing itself from the controlling influence of religious ideas. He not only continues to discuss social movements from the point of view of whether they hinder or promote the dissemination of religious beliefs, but he expects others generally to take up the same attitude. The discovery by an infant of its own toes, in all probability, initiates a very profound psychological revolution. But it is a trifling affair compared with the one that will be worked when Christians genuinely appreciate the existence in the State of others besides themselves. These strike one as rather poor reasons for supporting an excellent cause, and though doubtless they will appeal with some force to religious people, the strength of their appeal is derived from the inability of Christians to recognise the legitimate claims of non-Christians. Is it really a vital question whether the operation of the Blasphemy Laws injures religion or not? Would all Christians support prosecutions for blasphemy if they helped religion? Once upon a time, they unquestionably did this. In a society where religious belief is general and uniform, it can hardly be doubted that the suppression of anti-religious opinion helps to preserve and perpetuate religion. Persecution can accomplish its end if it can be made effective enough. It may work greater evil in other directions, but it can do, and has done, time after time, all that it aimed at doing. Assuming, then, that all attacks on Christian belief could be crushed out by persecution, would Christians support it? If they would not, does it matter whether these laws injure religion or not? It is quite sufficient that they are unjust, that even though they benefit religion they strike at the higher interests of the whole of society. And their removal is demanded on the ground that in the modern State they are inevitably unjust and fundamentally vicious.

Why should it be unfortunate if the public—the Christian public, of course—get the impression that the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws will mean greater liberty in attacking

religion, even in "blunt and disagreeable language"? It is quite a matter of taste whether language is disagreeable; and blunt speech is anything but a vice. Why should the faith of the Christian not be as open to attack as one's opinion concerning vaccination or the land laws? If the Christian will only awaken to the fact of others being in the world, he will realise that these others have the same right to attack him that he has to attack them. The demand of any believer that laws such as the Blasphemy Laws shall be maintained because their removal would make attacks on religion easier is a piece of sheer impertinence. If religion is attacked, it must depend for defence upon the weapons that every threatened opinion has to depend upon. But non-Christians do not now exist in virtue of the gracious kindness of Christians, and they decline to be muzzled in order to gratify the egotism and cowardice of believers.

To be quite frank, Freethinkers do want greater liberty to attack religious opinion—not merely legal liberty, but social liberty. What is the use of liberty, if it does not include the right to attack—within limits recognised by all and imposed upon all—anything that we consider untrue or dangerous? Truth is always attacking. Justice is always attacking. There is no good done in the world without attack. And we object to the policeman being turned into a theological expert, or a judge in first instance, as to what constitutes profane or blasphemous language. When the Catholic Church punished people for blasphemy, it had at least the dignity and sense to bring the offender before a court of ecclesiastics who might be considered experts on the subject. If the charge was damnable, the procedure was dignified. But it never condescended to the ridiculous measure of calling in the watchman or the man-at-arms to inquire whether his chaste ears had been affronted by the language used. Why, if Christians were only moderately endowed with a sense of humour, the Blasphemy Laws would not need repealing—they would be laughed out of existence.

What the Christian must be brought to realise is that we are not living in the thirteenth, or even in the seventeenth, century. We are in the twentieth century, and the conscious basis of the State is no longer what it was in the Middle Ages. Society is no longer made up of believers, and no one expects that it ever will be made up of believers. The existence of all sorts of opinion is not merely regarded as inevitable; it is accepted as something that is beneficial to the State. Uniformity of religious belief is as impossible in modern society as it is undesirable; and by mere social growth the position of religion has changed from one of paramount importance to a matter of purely private opinion.

There are others. That is the immediate lesson for the Christian to learn. The modern State is not Christian. It is not based upon Christianity; it does not aim at the realisation of Christian ideals. The Christian is a member of the State. So is the Jew, so is the Mohammedan, so is the Atheist, so are scores of others. The Christian is no longer cock of the roost. He is but one of many. It may be disturbing to his egotism to face the fact; but face it he must, sooner or later. And when he does face it, if he does not become a better Christian in consequence, he will at least be a better man and a more profitable citizen.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## OLD TIME CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

IN the remoter centuries of Hellas, popular opinion concerning hurricanes, thunder and lightning ascribed these meteorological occurrences to the activities of supernatural beings. Vulcan was viewed as the forger of thunderbolts, Jupiter as hurling them at his antagonists while Aeolus conveyed them in a bag to Aeneas. Pythagoreans later elaborated these legends and declared that the lightning flash served to frighten the damned dwellers in Tartarus.

Yet, in early days of Greek civilisation, a truly scientific spirit appeared. In the Grecian colonies of Ionia, philosophers concluded that all natural phenomena were controlled by law. Subsequently Plato, Aristotle, and other eminent thinkers strove to explain all remarkable happenings in terms of observation and reflection. Later still, in Pagan Rome, Pliny, Seneca, and Lucretius, among others, cultivated and expounded an incipient science.

But in that evil hour when the Christian Church rose to authority, this progressive movement was obstructed, for the Christian Fathers turned to their sacred Scriptures as their sole guide and instructor in terrestrial, as well as in celestial affairs. That secular science was anathema to the clergy is conclusively shown by the utterances of the most influential Church Fathers concerning Biblical inerrancy. Tertullian declared that certain passages in Scripture prove that the fires of hell and lightning are identical, and this assertion was adopted by later churchmen who found evidence of its truth in a sulphurous smell noticeable during thunderstorms. Moreover, the most childish ideas were cherished concerning the so-called firmament. St. Ambrose opined that thunder is caused by the winds rushing through a solid firmament, while many other fables equally fantastic were eagerly accepted by clergy and laity alike.

Another grotesque example of Christian science is afforded by the credulity of St. Jerome. Professor A. D. White in his invaluable "Warfare of Science with Theology" assures us that: "St. Jerome held that God at the Creation, having spread out the firmament between heaven and earth, and having separated the upper waters from the lower, caused the upper waters to be frozen into ice in order to keep all in place. A proof of this view Jerome found in Ezekiel regarding the crystal stretched above the cherubim."

The Scriptures became the final court of appeal throughout Christendom, to the Reformation and beyond, in all subjects relating to science. This misfortune is mainly attributable to the *ipse dixit* of St. Augustine, whose influence has been enormous in every Christian community. In truth, his words obtained almost inspired authority when he said: "Nothing is to be accepted save on the authority of Scripture, since greater is that authority than all the powers of the human mind." As a result, any opinion contravening this dogmatic pronouncement, however mild its form, was deemed heretical and to be persecuted even to death in this world, and to suffer eternal torment in the next.

Under Augustine's guidance, the science of Pagan antiquity was sentenced to a speedy extinction. Civilisation and culture themselves, save in those retreats where the old spirit survived, were blotted out and Christendom continued shrouded in deep darkness until the long extinguished intellectual light from Pagan sources was faintly relumed by Arabian scientists from Moslem Spain.

During the sixth century of our era a quaint metaphysician, Cosmas Indicopleustes, deduced from the ninth chapter of Hebrews his hypothesis that our globe is a flat parallelogram "and that from its outer edges rise immense walls supporting the firmament; then throwing together the reference to the firmament in Genesis . . . he insisted that over the terrestrial universe are solid arches containing a vault supporting a vast

cistern 'containing the waters'; finally, taking from Genesis the expression regarding the 'windows of heaven,' he insisted that these windows were opened and closed by the angels whenever the Almighty wishes to send rain upon the earth or to withhold it."

Preposterous as this appears to a modern mind, this assumption was accepted for centuries and some of its ablest ecclesiastics sought to supplement and strengthen it. In the seventh century, the most notable prelate of his time in discussing the rainbow, hailstorms, frost and snow was fairly rational in his speculations, but he was so much at the mercy of his environment that his views in general resembled those of his benighted neighbours.

Then arose the Venerable Bede whose ideas concerning the much discussed firmament were quite as erroneous as those of his forerunners. Still, Bede's meteorological speculations carried great weight and apparently nearly all anonymous writers of succeeding centuries followed in his footsteps and their productions were usually ascribed to him. One of these spurious writings solemnly asserts that: "Some say that the earth contains the animal leviathan and that he holds his tail after a fashion of his own, so that it is sometimes scorched by the sun, and so the earth is shaken by the motion of his indignation; he drinks in also, at times, such huge masses of the waves that when he belches them forth all the seas feel their effect." Yet, strange as it seems, this extraordinary tidal theory found easy acceptance as gospel truth.

When the ninth century opened, another oracle of Christian science appeared in the person of Archbishop Maurus who propounded the doctrine that the firmament holds up the water resting over the heavens because it consists of solid ice. Yet, despite all this clerical obscurantism, by the twelfth century, after Arabian philosophy had illumined Christendom, Honorius of Autun manifested a modicum of scientific enlightenment. He explained the causes of rain rationally and denied that thunderbolts were made of stone. He was evidently a Rationalist in principle, but the baleful religious prejudices of his period were too powerful to permit the slightest expression of dissent from orthodox superstition.

Even in the much praised thirteenth century the most infantile ideas concerning the cosmos were cherished as sacred verities. Nevertheless, this period witnessed an improvement when Albert the Great tried to reconcile the teachings of the Athenian philosopher, Aristotle, with the theological speculations of the Church. Then, despite the customary clinging to traditional beliefs, a change of outlook emerged, and a dim twilight of reason dawned on sacerdotal darkness. As Professor White avers, after Albertus Magnus: "Aristotle is treated like a Church Father, but extreme care is taken not to go beyond the maxim of St. Augustine; then, little by little, Bede and Isadore fall into the background, Aristotle fills the whole horizon and his utterances are second only to the text of Holy Writ."

The unending conflict between good and evil has ever occasioned reflection. In Pagan, as in Jewish times, the local or national divinities almost invariably, it was supposed, favoured their devotees. A sudden storm might decide a battle, and the victors acclaimed it as a proof of their god's prowess, while their foes would regard their defeat as due to the intervention of demons. Even in medieval Florence men were supposedly slain by lightning for neglect of their religious duties. This belief remained universal in Catholic centuries and long survived the Reformation. Thunder and lightning had a direct bearing on human life and Romanists averred that "Luther was struck by lightning in his youth as a caution against departing from the Catholic faith."

Even the Protestant, Nuber, in his "Weather Sermons," in his review of meteorological phenomena, especially those that afflict mankind, enumerates the five sins that God punishes with

bail and lightning. These, he declares, are "impenitence, incredulity, neglect in the repair of churches, fraud in payment of tithes to the clergy; and oppression of subordinates."

These and kindred misconceptions have long been on the intellectual scrapheap. Yet, as recently as 1870, a cultured cleric, the Bishop of Verdun, ascribed the drought which devastated his diocese to the Sabbath breaking so prevalent. Again, even now, prayers are officially offered for rain or fine weather, as the case may be, which seems to prove that the clergy have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing of their past follies and misdeeds.

T. F. PALMER.

## A POLICEMAN SPEAKS

WE are usually inclined to take for granted the ordinary folk with whom we come into contact in everyday life—the postman and the dustman, the civil servant and the insurance man, the policeman and the grocer. It rarely occurs to us that such people lead lives of their own, have ideas of their own. A recent book by a detective-sergeant, Mr. A. J. Comryn, gives cause for thought to everyone who has thus taken for granted the ordinary man. Its title is "Your Policemen are Wondering," it is published by Victor Gollancz, at 8s. 6d., and excellent value for money it is.

Sergeant Comryn is, indeed, a thinker. He portrays his "beat" with neatness and precision, and he has a gift for hitting off a character in a few words. But the basic philosophy behind the book is what, I will confess, I found somewhat surprising. I ask the reader: would you expect a policeman to be an appreciative listener to the music of Grieg, would you expect him to have read Mr. J. W. Dunne's fascinating if somewhat mystical book "An Experiment with Time"? I admit quite frankly that I was surprised when I found these, and many other facts to be available in the pages of this autobiographical narrative.

But his opinions on religion are what will interest readers of these columns, and he expresses himself with great frankness on religious issues in a chapter ostensibly concerned with a spiritualist seance to which he was taken by a friend who was an enthusiastic spiritualist. Read this:—

The theory behind most religions is belief in another order of existence; and the practice, an endeavour to hold intercourse with it. Since neither theory nor practice led to a demonstrated fact, faith early supervened. Not faith in good men and good actions, but faith in gods of any calibre. Blind, unreasoning, unquestioning faith. Faith in cruel gods, jealous gods, bloodthirsty gods, lustful gods, proud gods, insular gods. And what can this faith mean but faith in cruelty, jealousy, blood, lust, pride, and insularity?

That is something that could not have been better said by any Freethinker. Indeed, one begins to suspect, before one has finished the book, that Mr. Comryn is a Freethinker. But be that as it may, the fact is that his book will appeal to Freethinkers everywhere as a first-rate piece of work. It does not argue in a vacuum. It relates theories to the world at large; and it therefore succeeds in making plain to the perceptive reader the way in which the ordinary man can form a worthwhile philosophy of life without any assistance from supernatural sources.

JOHN ROWLAND.

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## ACID DROPS

Another instance of the Church's attitude "Heads I win, tails you lose". The "Sunday Express" reports that the body of Mother Eupharsia Barbier was exhumed from the Chapel of St. Anne's Convent. The doctors present must have been disappointed, they were looking for "signs of miraculous preservation." The body, however, was so sodden with moisture that the coffin was re-sealed and returned to the vault. Had the Church been careful 50 years ago to have buried the Rev. Mother in an airtight coffin, she would to-day have been a saint. As it is, she is now only a "minor" and will be known as "Blessed." We have noted this procedure before, all we want now is for the Church to start organising pilgrimages to Sturry, Kent, advertise one or two "cures", and the scene will be set for an English "Lourdes".

Our readers will know our opinion on Sunday Cinemas, and also what we think of the Church's stunts to attract a congregation. We were nevertheless very pleased when a Montrose minister was prosecuted for giving a cinema show in the Church Hall, and was informed that "no man is exempt from the by-laws of the Burgh." We would have been more pleased had the prosecution added: "Not even a man of God." The minister, the Rev. J. P. Hetherington, was fined £2 for contravening the by-laws. It says little for religion when stunts such as cinema and whist drives have to be used to attract a sufficient number of people to praise God. There is no doubt that religion to-day has reached a very low level. Its leaders deny its dogmas and its miracles, and the followers have to be bribed.

Our contemporary, the "Daily Herald", reports that Sir Stafford Cripps, when speaking at a London Meeting to arrange a universal week of prayer, said, "We are in danger of seeing democracy die out if we fail to give it the soul of Christianity. If we were to rely solely on material considerations, we should find that democracy would be superseded by totalitarian methods." We know that there are Labour M.P.s who no more believe in the "soul of Christianity" than we do, and it is a pity that the "Daily Herald" rarely, if ever, gives us their views. In any case, a Universal Week of Prayer! If our experience of the weeks of prayer during the war count for anything, then the result of Sir Stafford's effort will probably mean weeks, or even months of universal calamity. May the Lord preserve us from that!

Canon Christopher Turner, Vicar of Hinckley, has been performing daily penance because gift parcels were stolen from his church. He intends to carry on with his penance until February 11th, or until the stolen goods are returned. Note that he is only doing a few weeks' penance; someone ought to tell him Saint Simon Stylites did penance for 40 years perched on top of a pillar in the desert, with what effect we cannot tell, but we give the example to the vicar for what it is worth. We ourselves would like to know where God was when the thieves stole the parcels. The vicar ought to know that—he is the mediator between man and God—at least so we have been told.

Really to understand our first-rate clergymen we have to remember where the Christian leaders come from and what are the real beliefs that determine their movements. We have to begin with the fact that the Christian religion was not fundamentally interested with human betterment in this world. The aim was to prepare human beings for another world when within a definite time this world would come to an end, one section of humans going to heaven with the larger section going to hell. The differences between good and bad turned on the point of whether, at a not very far distant time, God or Satan would have the largest number of followers. That theory is not dead; it has a large number of followers, and from the Christian point of view the constant question is heaven or hell? The concern of our Christian leaders really turns on this point.

If we bear that in mind we shall understand why one of our leading godites objects to the Marriage Service as it exists in the Church of England. He says: "It is distressing for bride

and bridegroom to be told in the hour of their marriage that matrimony must not be understood to satisfy Man's carnal lust and appetite and to avoid fornication that such persons who have the gift of continency and marry and keep themselves undefiled members of the body of Christ."

We agree with the Bishop that if we take the Christian conception of marriage it is a very low one, and a woman in church may feel rather uneasy. But it is good to keep the Christian informed as to the real quality of his creed. To essentially Christianity the ideal is that of the man and woman who have what Christianity calls a pure life. We have that expressed fully in the Roman Church where the real priest is unmarried. It may be pointed out that the emphasis laid by Christianity as to uncleanness of marriage is that a woman who has given birth to a child must be "cleansed" by a set prayer before she returns to her husband. There is another reason for this, but it does not touch the matter we are dealing with.

The Reverend Bishop Barnes has created quite a noise because being a Bishop he has said some things, not completely good, but rather better than we should expect from a Bishop. But having said so much for a parson it seems a pity that, first, he did not go further, and second, that he did not go the whole hog and have done with it. But as a part of the magic material he does not appear to make so much bother over it.

Here is one instance that people feel that Dr. Barnes is not quite so clear, nor as daring as he might be. He says that the finest religious understanding that mankind has gained comes from the Hebrew prophets. That is just nonsense. First of all, what most people accept as the Hebrew Bible is not the Bible we should have. There have been so many different changes that no one can be certain, and certainly changes of interpretations puzzle everyone as to which is correct. India, Egypt, Greece, and other nations might have a say to that. When a book has had as many changes as the Bible has undergone it is well to be careful on praise or blame.

Our "Big Bugs" in the churches must have been astonished by the brilliance of wisdom. Here is a sample from the Archbishop of Canterbury. It runs that he has "no patience with those who say that if the world were comprised of all Christians there would be no danger from Atomic Bombs." That really sounds like real wisdom—of the religious kind. We may add to it. If all people were honest there would be no thieves. If no one quarrelled there would be no fighting, and so on, and so on. But the wisdom of the Archbishop is superb. We take off our hat for the wisdom displayed. It is so clever that we give our say clearly, that it is only from the Churches that one gets such wisdom.

It is not often nowadays that there is any bother concerning the use—or non-use—of religious swearing in a court. But incidents do occur. It occurred in the West of England once when a man in the court wished to take the oath on a Donat Bible. The Judge said he could not admit that. We believe the Judge was quite wrong. Without any discussion a man or woman may affirm instead of swearing. The Judge is entitled to ask one question: "On what grounds," and stop at that. It is not often nowadays that any trouble occurs. It is only very seldom that any offence occurs. The fight for this freedom was secured by Charles Bradlaugh. It is high time now that all religious oaths were abolished. The less of these fantastic performances in a court of law the better. The religious oath never stopped a Christian telling a lie.

The evidence for the existence of the Devil is as strong, and as foolish as the existence of God. No one has ever seen God, and no man has ever seen the Devil. The lack of seeing is very striking. If we have the courage to look man in the face, we can afford not to bother waiting for some other world.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

We have to thank a Bebington reader of the "Freethinker" for being successful in introducing to the Bebington Library, a copy of the "Age of Reason" by Thomas Paine, with an introduction by Chapman Cohen. This is an example that should be followed by all Freethinkers all over the country. We also have a few copies over every week of the "Freethinker" which we are sure would be an asset to any Public Library's reading room, and would be pleased to supply copies. We suggest that Freethinkers see what can be done.

"The Problem of Palestine" is the subject of Mr. F. A. Ridley's lecture for The Leicester Secular Society to-day (Sunday), in The Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. The problem is certainly an acute one pressing for a speedy solution and Mr. Ridley's address should be interesting and informative. The lecture begins at 7 p.m.

Here is a fine specimen of either misunderstanding or deliberate falsity. The Rev. F. Ferguson declared to a large congregation that the Church of England took its wealth, not from the people of the State, but the "endowments and freewill offerings." We take a good, long breath, and call attention to the fact that a very large part of the millions held by the Church of England were taken from the people by Act of Parliament. In proof of this we suggest that people pay a visit to the British Museum, and spend an hour or two in noting the tremendous amount of money which was taken from the people until the Church was bought out. There should be in the museum a copy of the "Black Book". Our copy is dated 1831. There are other issues and calculations, but they are all worth reading. The fact is that there are actually some of these ancient money collectors still in operation. The pious millionaire leaving his money to the Church but not to taxes on land, etc., made the Church wealthy. And in addition the non-payment of rates, etc., that all people must pay, but which are not paid by the Church, is what we may call the silent gift. But the people have to find it. God moves by strange ways. So also does his followers.

A correspondent informs us that whenever he is handed a religious tract or leaflet he offers to read it if the donor will also read an anti-religious pamphlet; he then hands over a copy of one of the many Secular Society pamphlets. We suggest that readers obtain a supply of "Pamphlets for the People," by Chapman Cohen, and pamphlets by Ingersoll or DuCann to be ready for such an emergency. Full details of pamphlets for sale will be found on the back page of "The Freethinker." Without a doubt, the written word is more powerful than the spoken word. We thank our correspondent, and commend the idea to Freethinkers.

## PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AND SCIENCE

### I

THE other evening I was fortunate enough to listen to Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell give an address on psychical research. Mr. Tyrrell is, I understand, a past president of the Society for Psychical Research, a distinguished investigator himself, and the author of "Science and Psychical Phenomena" (Methuen, 1938) and "The Personality of Man" (Pelican Books, 1947). He is, therefore, right up to date, and what he has to say on such a controversial subject ought to be listened to with the greatest attention. Moreover he is—as far as I could judge—an active opponent of "materialism," and therefore to a convinced materialist and Atheist as I am, any evidence he brings forward to show the complete untenability of Materialism should be examined with the greatest care.

Everything he claimed in support of his case can be found in the above two books and he makes a special point of being rigorously scientific. He has nothing but contempt for those scientists and Materialists who refuse to consider what he puts forward as incontrovertible facts—and he is not afraid to admit, at the same time, in discussing "the physical type of mediumship," that "the evidence is conflicting, and the honesty of most of the mediums so far tested is at least doubtful." Personally, I should have thought that this would have made it difficult to give us any "undeniable facts," but one is never sure when dealing with psychical researchers.

In the discussion which followed the above mentioned address, I asked for proof of "survival" and also pointed out that all the mediums so far "rigorously" tested had been proved to be fraudulent and that most psychical researchers were easily bamboozled; but Mr. Tyrrell, who preferred to discuss telepathy, refused to deal with me in any way whatever. I expect he sensed a hated Materialist.

Now it seems to me, however much from a purely academic point of view we should continue experiments in telepathy, the real object of psychical research should be proof of survival. I am not competent enough to make a definite criticism of experiments I have never seen, and about which there is still a great deal of difference of opinion; but in the first volume of the Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research published nearly seventy years ago there are accounts of many experiments on "thought transference" with diagrams, and no doubt many of the experimenters were then as convinced of the reality of telepathy as is Mr. Tyrrell these days. Supposing, however, thought transference can be experimentally shown to take place; it only proves that we do not know so far all that can be known of what we call for convenience sake "mind." If in the course of Evolution changes are taking place in this particular form of energy, why should we be greatly surprised? Can anyone say for certain that no form of life now existing will ever change, that everything is irrevocably fixed? My materialistic outlook is in no wise altered if telepathy be proved true, and I am quite unmoved by the long and, to me, most wearisome accounts of experiments recorded so minutely by Mr. Tyrrell in his anxiety to show that telepathy is a fact, and Materialism is annihilated.

So anxious is Mr. Tyrrell to show how he dislikes Materialism that he quotes Prof. Whitehead—another hater—as follows:—

"The old foundations of scientific thought are becoming unintelligible. Time, space, matter, material, ether, electricity, mechanism, organism, configuration, structure, pattern, function, all require reinterpretation. What is the sense of talking about a mechanical explanation when you do not know what you mean by mechanics?"

The reader should note that these terms are questioned if one claims to be a Materialist, and it is necessary at all costs

to fog the issue with such blatant deniers of God Almighty. Prof. Whitehead is quite right in insisting on—as far as possible—exact definitions; in all his debates Charles Bradlaugh was most careful to define his terms. But Mr. Tyrrell does not quote anybody asking for similar exact definitions from the psychical researcher. For him it is sufficient to give his own interpretations of “extrasensory perception,” the “subliminal self,” “supernormal,” “teleesthesia,” the “extra-conscious portion of self” (the Freudian “unconscious”) and many other similar terms—and they are naturally, or ought to be, quite clear and should be accepted by all.

Whether Prof. Whitehead knows it, or says he does not, when a Materialist talks about the “mechanical explanation” of the Universe, all he means is that there is no Almighty God or the Ghost of a God, or even the Son of a God, personally responsible for its “creation” from nothing at all. We see no evidence of the “handiwork” of a personal and living Deity in the “laws” of Nature. We see Nature in its many manifestations and we try to account for some of them; but as soon as we probe deeper into things we realise many limitations in thought.

Yet even here we do not see a God or a “Spirit.” The believers in spooks and spirits, ghosts and goblins, witches and warlocks, are always ready to ask such questions as “What makes a tree grow and bear fruit?”—and if one admits ignorance, triumphantly reply by saying their answer that “God did it” fully explains the process. Mr. Tyrrell does not make it quite as crude as that but he is ready to talk about the “super-normal” as if that annihilated Materialism and proved God or the Ghost of a God or, anyway, “spirits.” If you press him further, then he will devote pages to inquiring into “the incomprehensible nature of the ‘I’ in man.” In this way, he can blandly insist that the term “survival” is “something of a misnomer as it implies projection of the present personality (with its own kind of Time still clinging about it) into conditions entirely alien to it.” Very good, but is it not a fact that almost all Spiritualists and Psychical Researchers have always insisted that the exact “personality” of a man survives after death and can be summoned from the mighty deep for a shilling or so through a medium? These spirits prove their identity in a hundred ways only known through the inquirer; and now to say that the “personality” that “survives” may well be something quite different from the person once living proves how much Mr. Tyrrell is up against the hard analysis of the unbeliever, and how desperately he is trying to save something of “survival” from his materialistic opponents. The way he tries to do it is like this:—

“Thus we would substitute for ideas of survival and pre-existence the vaguer but wider conception of aggregates or complexes of grades of being animated by an ‘I-principle’ coagulating themselves out of the greater whole and passing in so-called ‘death’ into new forms of coagulation. The term ‘survival’ would then be seen to be the importation of an idea belonging to the smaller life into the conditions of the larger life, where it has no real application.”

After reading that passage I could well see why Mr. Tyrrell refused to answer me when I asked him about survival—though I would dearly like to see how the numerous mediums advertising their wares in the columns of spiritualist journals would react if I read it out to them.

In the forty years or so during which I have conducted my own psychical research, the one clear-cut claim was that it was the exact personality of the “dead” person which survived; though Sir A. C. Doyle on the other hand always insisted that young people grew up in Summerland to about 25 years of age, while old people went back to the same age as it was the best “all round” one. In addition, as he thought English was the dominant language, it was almost always taught to the spirits who did not know it—like the mother of Harry Houdini, for

example. With such ideas, I am not surprised that the eminent author of “Sherlock Holmes” is completely ignored in Mr. Tyrrell’s two books.

But I want to say something about the inflexible scientific method used by Mr. Tyrrell, and that must wait for another article.

H. CUTNER.

## (The) PASSION

### II

INTENSITY of feeling is expressed in the curse, the theological anathema, in wholesale declamation in the name of righteousness that calls on the wrath of God. In the intimate connection of this with the condemnation of adultery and fornication, we see the sublimation of repressed and inhibited feeling. Sex was “practical politics” in sacerdotal celibacy as well as in puritanical bigotry. The idea of sublimation as reorientation on a “higher plane” is belied by the history of Christianity, which has shown outbursts of mass hysteria amounting to sheer lunacy.

Methods of cultivating ecstasy may be seen in the ascetic practice of fasting, sexual abstinence, and the use of “discipline” in flagellation; mystically “bearing the Cross” in “imitation of Christ.” The development of method in the cult of mysticism through medieval and sixteenth centuries shows the discipline becoming less physical, more psychological. The fantastic imagery, whether in vision or verbal visualisation, is a mental imitation of actual reproduction, dramatic or pictorial, involving, as with decoration and heraldic pageantry, fetishistic and totemic symbolism. And all through, we can see that, whether in actual performance or in mystical contemplation, the state of passion achieved is consequent upon the method utilised.

The method used is a conditioning factor and customary usage of poetic allusion and rhetorical eloquence is equally practical, and has its psychological consequence. In this sequence and consequence the psychological factor is not causal. Certainly the passion is vital, and dynamic; but in considering the psychological factor as causal, Christianity is inconsequential. The consequence is the resultant of all conditioning factors including actual performance; ritual, ceremonial, incantation, prayer; we are concerned with an actual technique; conditioning, training, discipline; the actual cultivation of passion.

Religion is practical psychology; a technique of illusion; a dream fantasia, with its wish-fulfilment and delirious ecstasy. It seems unreasonable, to a Christian, that his feelings are of no consequence; for him they are the intensest reality. But the psychological aspect is not causal, it is the resultant of conditioning, as belief is a consequence of training, and passion is sublimation consequent upon discipline. And it would be idle to consider a maze of rationalisation as anything but a consequence of Christianity, or even of its persistence. It is the practices and customs that are of consequence.

In its psychological approach, Christianity is concerned with personal feeling. In its personal appeal it finds a psychological necessity for the continuance of conditioning performances. In pandering to popular prejudice, artistic merit, aesthetic delight, idealistic purpose, moral virtue and incentive, combine in personal satisfaction, as excuses for essentially religious practices. The pomp and circumstance of civic and political ceremonial still retain a religious character. An archbishop is by no means out of place at a coronation or the wedding of a princess. These are cultural survivals that mould conduct and have a psychological consequence.

It is practical and dynamic. Although its psychological concern involves academic and philosophical consideration, not only of intellectual and moral, but aesthetic and so-called spiritual values. Even in its concentration on, and re-interpretation in,

theory; the necessity for metaphysical assumption; the meaning of symbolism; it retains its mystical technique in picturesque imagery; visionary and verbally. It retains its personal approach; its personal appeal. Though it touches every aspect of human endeavour, it remains intensely personal.

The forest glade, the grove and the cromlech, are past. The church and the pulpit is passing, but the Passion has been expressed in all the arts. With modern science, radio and screen, a passionate appeal finds a much wider congregation.

H. H. PREECE.

**WHO MED THE WURRIKD?**

In a little village near Tipperary town lived Paddy Cassidy and his family. Their home was a labourer's cottage with the usual half-acre of ground attached. Now the Cassidys were poor and godless and a disgrace to the good Catholic parish in which they lived, as they neither attended Mass nor sent their children to school. Each new priest who came to the parish tried to reform them, but none met with success. At last arrived Fr. Flaherty, straight from the Seminary and full of zeal in the cause of the Lord.

On hearing of the Cassidys he determined to succeed where others had failed and forthwith headed for their cottage. On arrival he pulled the string of the door latch and entered without further ceremony. In the kitchen he found Mick Cassidy, a boy of about eleven. Fr. Flaherty flung at him the first question of the Irish catechism. "Who med the wurrikd?" bawled the priest. Mick had no idea who made the world and he promptly said so.

What was the surprise of Mick's father, who was digging at the back of the house, to see the new priest appear, dragging his son by the ear. "Isn't this a disgrace?" said Fr. Flaherty.

"Your son doesn't know a word of his catechism: I asked him who med the wurrikd, and he couldn't tell me!" "Musha," said the father, shrugging his shoulders, "for all of the wurrikd poor Mick will own, it's all the same to him who med it!"

N. F.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**JEWISH RECORDS**

Sir,—May I ask Percy G. Roy (Jewish History) what evidence have we for the Jews prior to the time of the Maccabees? We have yet to discover that there is archaeological evidence that the Jews were ever in Egypt or even Palestine.—Yours, etc.,

H. H. PREECE.

**TRYPHO AGAIN**

Sir,—It is a pity that Mr. Cutner, in his otherwise interesting articles on Bishop Barnes, reverts to his old game of imputing dishonesty to those who reject his gloss on a passage in Justin's "Trypho". Here is what Justin makes Trypho say, rendered as literally as I can without murdering the English language:—

"The Messiah, if he is born and exists anywhere, is unknown and does not know himself and has no power until Elijah comes and anoints him and makes him manifest to all."

Here is how Mr. Cutner paraphrases this:—

"We know nothing whatever about him, when he was born, or even whether he lived."

It is obvious that the second sentence does not remotely represent the first. Not wishing to emulate Mr. Cutner's controversial methods, I will not accuse him of dishonesty, but only say that he has Nelson easily beaten at the trick of putting a telescope to his blind eye when it suits him. He even tries to put it to ours as well! Fortunately, we can see.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

**OBITUARY**

**H. E. HILL**

Many Liverpool seamen will regret the passing of Mr. H. E. Hill, aged 70, who died suddenly at his home in Liverpool. He was a great admirer of the "Freethinker," and took every opportunity of introducing freethought to shipmates and dock workers. He leaves a widow to mourn his passing.

W. C. P.

**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY**

**Report of Executive Meeting held January 8, 1948**

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

Also present: Messrs. Hornbrook, Seibert, Bryant, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Woodley, Page, Barker, Mrs. Quinton, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Bradford, Glasgow, West London Branches and to the Parent Society. The Secretary reported steps taken to correct untrue and misleading statements in letters appearing in "The Word" concerning the expulsions from the Bradford Branch N.S.S. A legacy of £258 10s. 3d. from the W. McIntosh decd. Estate was reported and by the death of the late J. Sanford, the N.S.S. will receive the residue of the Estate. New leaflets and other propaganda items were discussed and decisions made. The response to the conference circular to date was reported.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for February 12, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

**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, January 20, 7 p.m.: "Anxiety and Contemporary Politics," Mr. W. DAVID WILLS.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Does Freethought Matter?" Mr. L. EBURY.

**COUNTRY—INDOOR**

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Conservatism—What it Means," Mr. F. D. NORRIS.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Behaviourism," Mr. THOMAS MCINTYRE, M.A. B.Sc.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boars Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Whither Mankind," Rev. DUDLEY RICHARDS.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m. A Lecture, "The Problem of Palestine," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. V. SHORTT (Preston), "Freethought in Matters of Disease."

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Hall, Arcade, Pilgrim St.).—7 p.m. A Lecture, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Can Europe be Saved?" Mr. JOHN McNAIR (I.L.P.).

## THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

(Concluded from page 16.)

AS to Whitsun, at both churches it was practically by-passed. I venture to say that ninety-nine out of a hundred Christians to-day would be perplexed to explain what are called the functions of the Holy Spirit whose advent it commemorates. The "Methodist Recorder" was angry with me when, in my autobiographical book I called it the junior partner in the trinity. Sometimes it seemed a sleeping partner; it was so ignored. When, however, it was awake, we were given to understand it could be very nasty. A Jorkins compared with the Spenlow of the Father and Son! If you offended it, it would say, "Damn you," and whereas the other two would withhold the stroke until you were dead, the H.S. would inflict it now. He was a touchy sort of fellow and had a keen eye for an unpardonable sin. It was the worse because the nature of the sin was so obscure. In effect I think it amounted to refusing to answer the door when he knocked. I was a bit frightened by this ruthlessness. So once was John Bunyan. He went to an "ancient Christian" to ask if he thought he had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. The A.C. had "cold comfort"—he thought Bunyan had. I recall, too, a character in Borrow's "Lavengro" who was agonised by the thought. Matthew Arnold, in "Literature and Dogma," referred to certain Englishmen as imagining "a sort of infinitely magnified and improved Lord Shaftesbury" as representing the persons of the Trinity. This seems to me to have been unfair to his Lordship, as he certainly was not ruthless and fearsome. Arnold was, however, correct in saying that the third person "keeps very much in the background and works in a very secret manner, but very efficaciously nevertheless." Perhaps the last quality referred to his damning propensities.

Next came Harvest Festival. This coincided with the close of the cricket season and the time of the falling of leaves. It brought a certain melancholy to the soul. Still, there was something bright and cheering about our hall when decorated with fruit and vegetables. Churdles Ash, in Eden Phillpott's "Farmer's Wife," cannot understand why the Lord wanted hedge-clippings in his Holy House, but nobody in my young days ever questioned whether he liked huge marrows or leaves large enough to satisfy the hunger of a Leviathan. One thing they did achieve; they brought in some extra people. I am sure some, with no particular religious affiliation, went from place to place just to see what kind of a show they had. "We plough the fields and scatter" was as sure to be sung as "Days and moments swiftly flying" at the Watch-Night Service. A popular text with our hardware merchant was, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." It mattered nothing that the text came from Jeremiah and had no connection whatever with plans of salvation, as yet unhatched in what Matthew Arnold called the council chambers of the Trinity. The Evangelical mill could take any piece of scripture, and by assiduous grinding wring out of it drops of the antoning blood. After the Monday meeting it was usual to sell cheaply by auction the various offerings to the "Lord's house." I have known people whisper about this profanity and compare it to the hucksters in the Temple to whom the Lord used chastisement, but they were frowned down.

Christmas is always a jolly time unless misfortune's bitter blast around us blow. There is joy in commonalty spread, but what it has to do with Christian history it would be hard to say. Christians are adjured to awake and

"... salute the happy morn,

Whereon the Saviour of mankind was born,"

but I am sure on waking they think vastly more of presents at breakfast and good grub for dinner. I once heard a parson conclude his sermon with the phrase "and go cheerfully to

dino." He knew that, like the Cratchits, they smelt their Christmas game from afar. It was better even than incense.

Here again the Evangelicals score. They have indeed cause for thankfulness. This was well indicated by the local preacher who said that Christianity without Hell was not worth a damn. On the basis of their theology they would be in a dreadful way without the advent of a Saviour. It certainly gives significance to Christmas which must be entirely lacking with the "Liberals" or the "Modernists," as their Anglican counterparts are called, for damnation is something they refuse to take. The most popular carol refers to "offspring of a Virgin's womb" and "incarnate deity." How can they take that? I would recommend the Liberals, who want to chortle a carol, to choose "Good King Wenceslaus." It is non-theological and therefore non-controversial. After all, carols with many people are simply a form of a popular song. The "herald angels" and watching shepherds are of the family of Uncle Tom Cobleigh.

In this regard I will quote two passages relative to the festive season just passed. The first is from a letter of Thomas Carlyle, living at Chelsea. It is dated December 28, 1857.

"All mortals are tumbling about in a state of drunken saturnalia, delirium, or quasi-delirium, according to their several sorts; a very strange method of sending them a Redeemer; a set singularly worth redeeming too you would say."

The second is from the diary of John Burns which I have been reading at the British Museum. The date is December 24, 1901. He was then living at 108, Lavender Hill, Battersea.

"A bitter cold, wet day till evening. At twelve o'clock the roystering boozers from the 'Crown' sang hymns and carols till one o'clock. Of the two I prefer the comic sing-songs when singers are drunk. But as this publican is in the local church choir and subscribes to missions, it is only right he should have his bacchanalian annual according to his ritual, which is high, loud and beastly vulgar. His votaries ended by fighting for some whiskey. And of such is the kingdom of heaven."

I sympathise with both satirists, and I feel with Burns. To sing carols as a bacchanalian orgy is as revolting to me as to a Christian. Yet it cannot be denied that there is more of a saturnalian than a Christian origin in Christmas, and that the former is always on top. It shows once again how great a viceroy piety can be. To far the large majority Easter Sunday and Whit-Sunday are simply the days before the respective Bank Holidays. Christ's mass is simply the festival of the home life of man, woman, and child. Secularism sweeps into the Christian Year, and Mrs. Partington's broom was not more impotent to keep back the Atlantic ocean than are the efforts of the churches to keep any real sanctity in the so-called sacred seasons.

WILLIAM KENT.

## Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

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