

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Is God Bankrupt?

It is only fair to say that I did not coin the expression "Is God Bankrupt?" I found it at the head of a religious journal, and it was intended to be taken as a piece of sarcasm. But after considering I felt that this was about the most sensible remark one could make. Certainly it was good for a preacher and a Christian. It showed courage, if not understanding. Had it been used by any other—above all, had it first appeared in the "Freethinker"—it would have been pointed out as an example of our vulgarity, coarse abuse, and want of consideration for other people's feelings. I do not believe, apart from the absurd claims made for religious opinions, that the expression would show these characteristics; but it would certainly be called what I have said, and more. It is puzzling to see how my next-door neighbour is injured by my saying something concerning God; but on matters of religious belief people are very peculiar. Over the famous pious lie of the Atheist who pulled out his watch and gave God three minutes in which to strike him dead, religious people have worked themselves into a quite unwarranted state of excitement. Three minutes always seemed to me quite an unreasonably long time to allow; and if there is a God, and anyone cares to take the risk, I fail to see by what right anyone objects. If the Atheist had challenged Deity to prove his existence by killing the Archbishop of Canterbury, the matter would have worn a different aspect. But he took all the risks of his own conduct—not an unusual habit of Atheists. And as the story goes on to say that the Atheist was not struck dead, one is bound to infer either that God does not exist or that he was not angry with one who was trying to settle the question one way or the other. Anyway, the interference of believers seems quite gratuitous, and, in his regards Deity, highly impertinent. And after all, it was the great Martin Luther who referred to God as being half-witted.

When looking at the matter carefully, it might well be concluded that God, if there is one, is really bankrupt. He has done his best, and his best is not as sensible as many would desire. In the first place, no one knows whether there is a God or not. If he exists no one can be sure what he will do, or if he will do anything that is worth the doing. Even in the praying to God there is some sort of suspicion that he will not do the right thing at the right time, and in the right place. The very suggestion that God needs calling to this or that is an indication that all is not as it should be. The very suggestions to God seem to indicate that he is not doing what he should do. Some of our religious leaders say that God does not need our co-operation.

Taking all things into consideration there does seem some case for a very careful search to enquire whether God is, or is not, on the point of breaking down. Thousands of other gods have broken down, and there seems no reason for thinking that one god is really differently constructed than another.

In that case, what kind of enquiry should be taken? The first feature of bankruptcy is an inability to meet the legitimate demands upon one. Now, theistically, the whole of the universe, including of course human nature, is part of an ordered plan. God created everything, designed everything; he foresaw the end from the beginning; and the responsibility for everything rests with him. Human beings are born into the world by no act or wish of their own, and are furnished with characters that they are not in any sense responsible for possessing. Clearly, then, they have a right to demand that the power which decreed their existence should make that existence tolerably comfortable. But this is plainly not the case. People are born with physical constitutions that mark them from their birth as subjects for the prison or insane asylum, or with characters that doom them to join the wastrel class. And as though to make the injustice more complete, the circumstances amid which they are born and live seem admirably calculated to develop to the full the defects of their organisation. On a larger scale, social conditions often elevate the unworthy at the expense of the worthy; while the same conditions doom thousands to a constant struggle with misery and poverty, or reduce them to actual starvation.

It is useless pointing out that the majority do not come under either of these heads, or even under all of them collectively. A single unsatisfied creditor may make a concern bankrupt, and a single case of injustice renders bankrupt the providence of God. It is useless, too, to say that God is working to produce a perfect society ultimately. This may be satisfactory to those who share in the felicity of that ultimate state; but it is eminently unsatisfactory to those who precede that state, because God designed that human happiness thousands of years hence should be purchased through the sufferings of preceding generations. It is equally useless arguing that human conduct can and does redress many evils, and might redress more. This only shows that man has more benevolence than his Deity.

Again, a concern may be said to be morally bankrupt when it loses its credit. How stands God in this relation? What amount of faith has the world in the guidance or the protection of Deity? It is an old saying that when a man appeals to God he recognises how hopeless his position is. "God help you!" is not an expression of confidence that God will help, it is an utterance of despair at the prospect of help, just as "God only knows" is a pious way of proclaiming ignorance. In illness nearly every Christian dis-

believes that God will, as the New Testament states, cure the sick, while the few who do believe it are sent to prison by their fellow Christians for their pious folly. Believers profess to believe that God protects the widow and the fatherless, but Christian husbands show no backwardness in well insuring their lives—in case of the help not being forthcoming. "The Lord watches over this house" is a text that decorates many Christian homes, but inquiry will show that the same house is protected by a burglary insurance policy, while special attention is paid to locks and bolts. The very churches themselves are covered with lightning-conductors to protect God's buildings from the anger of their owner. Even the new social Christianity does not trust in God; it appeals to the electorate to send certain men to power, which they might do equally well were it wholly Atheistic. Evidently the belief in Deity is in a condition of moral bankruptcy.

God's credit is exhausted because no one knows what it is he does or what he is expected to do. In the old days, when God ruled the thunder and hurled the lightning, when he sent disease and averted plague, when prodigies appeared as his messengers, and ordeals were resorted to in his name to separate the innocent from the guilty, faith had a chance, and the credit of Deity was proportionately high. But now lightning is reduced to a child's toy, and disease, instead of revealing Deity, only reveals an interminable germicidal warfare. Prodigies are catalogued in the most prosaic manner, and, from the proud position of being so many Mercurys, are now regarded as evidence of the blundering of a system perfectly blind to human convenience and welfare. Even trial by ordeal has gone. No judge takes the slightest notice of an accused person's appeal to God to establish his innocence, and the accused himself places most reliance upon a first-rate counsel. The other day, in a well known case, the defendant referred to "God's earth," whereupon the opposing counsel objected to such an expression in a court of law. No reason was given, but it is just possible that the counsel was of opinion that, in a law-court, the Deity could not make good his title to such a possession.

In every branch of knowledge the direct action of Deity is universally ignored, and is often deliberately denied. Theologians to-day assure us that God only works through natural laws, and that it is useless our looking for him in particular phenomena. This, if true, divests the idea of God of all practical value, and endorses the Secularist view of life. For if God only works through natural law, and if natural processes, so far as human life is concerned, are unaffected by our religious beliefs, then it follows that whether there is or is not a God amounts to the same thing. All that we are concerned with is to develop our knowledge of natural forces and our capacity for bending them to our requirements.

Decidedly it *does* look as though God had gone bankrupt. But that is the fate of all concerns that have outlasted their period of utility. When God did the things I have named there was some apparent reason for his existence. Now that that time has gone, there is nothing left but to wind up the concern, and dismiss the large staff of officials who are at present engaged in satisfying a non-existent need with the shadow of a vanished commodity.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE BREATH OF LIFE

IN quest of origins, analysis is regressive, knowledge of the past is necessary. Antiquity is the traditional source of knowledge. The invention of printing aided the Renaissance of learning with its reaction, the Reformation. Search the classics, search the scriptures, search for documentary evidence. Protestants argued mistranslation and Catholics retaliated. The study of Latin and Greek was followed by Hebrew, leading on the study of languages and the origin of words, in search of the original meaning. But the further we go back the less confirmation we find.

With novels interlarded with quotations in Latin and Greek and many pretentious works, little more than linguistic exercises, the study of languages was part of the cultural development. Search was intensive, extensive and productive, aided by discoveries, notably the Rosetta stone; with the work of such men as Roth, Bergaigne, Champollion, De Rouge, Nietzsche was influenced by the Avestas and Schopenhauer, it is said, by the Vedas. "Fifty years ago," said Max Muller, in 1875, "there was not a scholar who could translate a line of the Vedas." We can now go back much further than the Scriptures; the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Babylonian tablets, the Avestas, the Buddhist Tripitaka, the Vedas. "There is nothing more ancient, nothing more primitive, than the Rigveda" the "most ancient of our sacred books."

There is controversy over chronology and meaning, even of basic terms. Rudolf Steiner said that only clairvoyance can see the hidden meaning in the Vedas. But, in the words of Bergaigne, incoherence is "the daily bread of Vedic poetry." In the Vedanta, we see the development of a pantheism as well as ritual; which can be followed through Brahmanism and Krishnaism to Buddhism. And it is argued that its influence can be traced across Persia through Egypt to Europe, and in the other direction, to China. "Only the One breathed, was everything, everywhere; the It, the That, the me in you." "The sages—discovered in Non-Being the link with Being."

It used to be said that Thales was the first philosopher explaining all in terms of one, water. But here is a philosophy far older, explaining all in all, in terms of One, breath. The utterance that is breathed, the spoken word, is the basis of this philosophy of the intangible; and breathing has an important place in the exercises of the Yoga. Physically we have an intangible fluid pervading space, becoming more palpable in tangible forms. But the outlook is basically psychological, on the analogy of breathing; memories, thoughts, desires, feelings, are transient; they come and go; like the past, present and future, these are inspiration, respiration and expiration. There is neither beginning nor end; all is change, a process of becoming.

The only certainty is in contradiction and negation. "No is His Name." The poetic metaphor expresses metamorphosis. We are told that there is no word in Sanskrit for nothing, is later that these ideas become those of creation, preservation and destruction. Here there is incarnation and the transmigration of souls, and poetic allusion favours sublimation suggestive illusion. It is absurd to seek doctrinal certitude where only vaguery and confusion is to be found. Consider primary terms, and the problem of translation. The verb be, being, is derived from the Sanskrit *bhu*, breath. But the word breath comes from the Anglo Saxon for steam, from Aryan for to heat, to burn. The very terms are analogues.

This Hindu notion of the universe, of the god breathing in and out; the association of breath and warmth with life, with air, and the light and heat of the sun, is seen in the "Living Fire" of Zoroaster in the Zendavesta. Here we see the analogy of light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil. Here also, a more definite concept of time: "excepting Time all things are created, Time is the creator." Here we see

connection with the emanations and eons of Babylonian astrology; the term "eon" implying a period of time. These are aerial messengers from the celestial realm. In Egypt also there are astrological implications, and insistence on the utterance of the "Word," which takes more definite form in the "Name"; and of transmutation and incarnation. We also see these notions in the apocalyptic scriptures, as in the visions Ezekiel saw in the sky which spoke through the mouth of the prophet.

With new complications the old notions persist. They are also seen in Greek philosophy. Here also is negation and contradiction; nature is a paradox; in the All in One; the confusion of multiplicity in unity; and the identity of opposites. For Heraclitus the beginning and the end are one, all comes from god, all returns to god. In Empedocles we have the expansion and contraction of the Universe; attraction and repulsion; love and hate; the affinities. He, like the Orphics and Pythagoreans, accepted metempsychosis; which is also implied in Plato's doctrine of reminiscence. The notion of an all pervading ethereal substance is essential to both Democritus' theory of vision and Plato's philosophy of ideas, and came to be accepted in the Latin term spirit, air.

The inception of physical science, like mathematics, was clouded by mysticism. With the Stoics, more clearly in Marcus Aurelius, we see communion and incarnation, typical of the Mystery. In the mystical neo-Platonism and Gnosticism we have Ultimate Reality, intermediaries, archons and angels; the confusion of ideas with visions; developing into Christian hagiology, with the ascent and descent, to heaven and hell. In the middle ages we have the scholastic controversy over "pure being" and the development of mysticism. Cabala means tradition and we see the old notions in the "astral light" of the cabalists and rosicrucians. The Breath of Life becomes more substantial in the mystical "elixir of Life" and transmutation of metals, of the alchemists, leading on to the "alkahest" of Paracelsus.

With the development of astronomy, optics and chemistry, with the cartesian "ether," spirit becomes more immaterial than air. In mysticism, astrology, crystal-gazing and clairvoyance, the notion of expansion and contraction becomes a form of irradiation. The magnetic analogy of Paracelsus led to animal magnetism and Mesmer's "magnetic fluid." With the study of hypnotism, following Schopenhauer's unconscious will, came the sub-conscious, the Freudian unconscious, suggestion and auto-suggestion. With the discarding of ether in scientific investigation of electro-magnetism, the emanations now come, not from above, but from a transcendental ego. The intangible spirit becomes an observable fact, in the "odic emanation" of Reichenbach, in the "ectoplasm," in the mediumistic "materialisation" of the spiritualistic seance.

We still live in a world of continuous change; of contradiction. From being certain in negation, we now appear to be trying to see the unseen, believe the incredible, unconscious of the acquisition of positive knowledge.

H. H. PREECE.

## DANCING AND RELIGION

WHEN greatly rejoicing, you may start "dancing with joy." Yet, the interconnection between dance and excitement works the other way round, too. Certain dance movements tend to working the performers up into a state of frenzy so that they consider themselves obsessed by a deity; and this, in fact, is the proper meaning of "enthusiasm" (to have a god—theos—in himself).

The position of dance in ritual and for profane ends as well, therefore, is explained by this "enthusiasm" it leads to. The origin of dance—from the Orphic "Emmelia" down to the

dances of exhaustion by the dervishes—lies in mystic. The ancient Greeks only danced when the effects of wine made themselves felt, the Romans considered dancing unworthy of a man, yet they had a special caste of priests, the "Saliers" (Jumpers) for the performance of sacred dances. Frequently dances were of an orgiastic nature, such as the "Bacchanalia," since they were meant to further fertility in nature and society. Hence the joyful dances when the days grow longer, when the corn is thriving, on the occasions of marriage or harvest thanksgiving. As a means of performing magic, the circular movements of the heavenly bodies are imitated by the dancers; those, of course, are grave and measured movements (like the Japanese Nô), gradually developing into the mystery play and finally the "drama." A simplified form of this circular movement for the magical protection from evil influences is the procession around the fields or the village, etc.

The recital of the Psalms, for instance, in the early church still was accompanied by dance steps and the Fathers did not see any wrong in this. St. Basilus (4th century A.D.) held that even the angels could do nothing better but dance in front of the Lord. He mentions Easter Dances under erotic songs as was the real purport of the "Song of Solomon" with Shulamith—the female counterpart of Shalômô in the mystical union of Sun and Earth—performing a lascive dance (c. vii) like David, the representant of Spring, in 2 Samuel vi, 14-16. During Holi—the Indian Spring Festival—the Nati's or Holy Temple maidens—perform a dance called "Natch" or Lâsya (from lâsa=to jump) according to the general belief that the Easter Sun jumps three times.

Not seldom the early Christians receded to deserted places in order to celebrate in dancing and it is significant that the first orders of monks were called the "Choreutes" (from the Greek "choros"—a dance in a ring). Up to the 17th century A.D., certain religious ceremonies—particularly Nativity Plays—went along with dancing, and until the 14th century, the "Danse Macabre" on the burying-ground was a social outlet, showing how even the great of this world become humble and equal to the poor in front of death.

However, along with those dances sanctioned by the Church there remained the old ritual dances in honour of pagan deities, with the performers being clad in animal skins or wearing masks. These dance rituals were decried as "Witches' Sabbath," and, at last, dance became separated from Church at all. St. Chrysostomus called dance a "circular movement, the centre of which is Satan."

Tradition, however, is deeply rooted and all over the world, especially in remote places, the ritual dances have survived under this guise or another, from the Austrian "Clog Dance" (Schuhplattler) with its sensual "Juchzern" (huzza shouts) down to our "Carnival" with fancy-dress balls and "Carnival licences!"

Up to the last war, at least, in the Carpatho-Ukraine, in the case of a fire the peasants called in—not the fire brigade—but the village witch (voroshka) who through her magic dance ought to appease the fire demons! In a similar way, primitive people, all stripped to the skin, dance round a sick one, and hope by this and the committing of much noise, to chase away the demons of illness.

In the olden days, among the Slavonic peoples, there was unrestricted sexual intercourse on certain occasions such as Christmas, whilst in Western Europe, the last days of the year were celebrated with Torch Dances (astral meaning). Until the year 70 B.C., on the 15th of the month of AB, the virgins of Jerusalem used to dance in the vineyards; later, Jewish youngsters—men and girls—danced with torches at the Feast of Tabernacles, i.e., after the Jewish New Year. Similarly, with the dance around the Golden Calf, the idol represented the Sun in the vernal equinox of Taurus.

PERCY GORDON ROY.

## ACID DROPS

At Inverness there has been much trouble over playing football on Sundays. The chief enemies of this are the Free Churches, and their provision of freedom is that of going to church. The Town Council, however, declines to prevent footballing on Sunday, and the godly group has discovered that this Sunday play is clearly part of Russian Communism. It is rather interesting to note the number of discoveries that have been made with regard to Russian Communism and how readily the Churches will use Communism as a bugbear. We shall hear next from some of the Churches that the growth of Freethought is due to the artfulness of Russian Communism.

But we should like to point out that Communism is a very old philosophy, it is found side by side with people who have good characters, and is mentioned rather strongly in the New Testament. Here is the meaning of Communism from a very good dictionary. According to that, Communism is, "A theory that all should possess and enjoy property in common, and that individual ownership should be abolished." To make it clearer, the dictionary adds that it is "the most extreme form of Socialism." This seems to mix things up a bit, for even the Pope claims to have some kind of "Socialism," and with Churchill claiming to be some kind of Socialist, none of us will be quite sure where we are.

The Bishop of Lichfield, Dr. Woods, has just finished, after many years, a book that bears the title, "What is this Christianity?" If we were certain that the Bishop had made it clear, we would order a copy of the book. But for several centuries people have been claiming to give the exact meaning of Christianity, yet each explanation only makes room for new ideas and theories. If we trust God himself, he has been continuously altering his mind as to the meaning of his own book, and his avowed followers have, literally, cut each other's throats to settle the differences. Actually there has always been constant quarrelling and throat cutting to determine what God meant.

North Shields is in a terrible position. We have that on the authority of Mr. E. Brown, President of the "National Sunday School Union." What is it that has come over South Shields? Many years ago we were very frequent visitors to North and South Shields, and found the Northerners very decent people indeed. On looking further, we find there are no complaints that North Shields has more drunkards than other places, there are not more thieves there than elsewhere; in short, what is the matter? Well, we find that the fears of Mr. Brown are that the population in South Shields is not so green as Mr. Brown would like them to be. Anyway, Mr. Brown is beseeching everyone to give himself "with fervency to God." That is quite in order, but it is just possible that God may go for Mr. Brown for so openly shouting that God is losing some of his people—who are none the worse for it.

Generally speaking, the Scotch people do not love the presence of the poor Irish people, particularly when they bring strong belief in Roman Catholicism. This is shown most in the larger centres, and above all in Glasgow, and Professor Forrester, of St. Andrew's, is more than uneasy as he showed in a crowded meeting in Glasgow, of the hold Rome is getting on Scotland. He drew some interesting facts concerning the influx of Roman Catholics, the ban of Catholics marrying non-Catholics, and above all, the great extent to which property is owned by the Catholic Church. We remember that there was some agitation on this point years ago, but the Roman Church managed to hush it up. It is certainly worth attention, although it will not be an easy job. The Roman Church is very, very artful, and plants its men in important places.

The Glasgow "Sunday Mail" gives a very pathetic picture of many thousands of children minus their swings, roundabouts, and other enjoyable playthings in the parks on Sunday. These things appear to be very simple and of small consequence. That is not true. To watch children on Sundays looking through the railings longing for the healthy playground that lies before them is of more serious character than most people appreciate. It is

robbing children of something that cannot be replaced. One of these days we shall find enough developed human nature to see to it that this robbing of children of what should be regarded as a first right is vilely wrong. It is only fair to say that some of the clergy have tried to give children their rights. It is good to know that some professed Christians are better than their creed. It is a punishable crime if the guardians of children do not provide sufficient food to keep them well fed. Perhaps we shall discover one day, that the provision of food and play is of greater importance than the maintaining of the existence of a religion that is worn out.

We were pleased to see from the pen of the Editor of "Reynold's News" an excellent sketch of one of England's greatest men—Thomas Paine. It is good that Paine's greatness is getting recognised, although not as it should be. Paine helped the people of England in every way, and to an extent that no other man did. Everyone of the main improvements that have been made during the past fifty years were laid down by him. His character may well be expressed by himself. Someone of note had said that "Where freedom exists, there is my country." Paine retorted: "Where freedom is not, there is mine." And he did more than say that, he practised it in a way that no other man did. No single man ever did so much for mankind, and he has been lied about more than other men. But his great crime was his attack on Christianity. Even in his fine article, the Editor of "Reynold's" refrained from mentioning Paine's work against Christianity. And this common omission is not by accident. It is fear of the power of religion still. The Church has lost much of its strength, but it is still powerful enough to make Members of Parliament and heads of newspapers fearful of attacking the Church.

The apostle Paul troubled his poor head about the heads of women. If he lived now when the ladies affect short hair he would go raving mad. It was a subject on which he felt profoundly. To his mind a woman losing her long hair, was like an angel falling from glory. He warns the whole sex against meddling with their tresses. Men, however, are recommended to crop close, long hair being "shameful." We have a shrewd suspicion that Paul was bald. Perhaps if a hair restorer had been invented a successful trial might have considerably changed his views upon this subject. Man was not created for woman says Paul, but woman for man. He is, of course, alluding to the old Rib Stacey. But a similar observation would have been as sensible about the two halves of a pair of scissors. When they meet what does it matter which was made for the other? Consistently with this view he says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. . . as the Church is subject unto Christ so let the wives be to their husbands in everything." Some men have tried this with no great success, and many a man thinks he is having his own way "in everything" when he is sweetly and beautifully led by the nose. Obedience is a hateful word in marriage. Its introduction makes the wife a legalised concubine. Besides, if there *must* be obedience, Paul's rule is ridiculously sweeping, for some women have more sense and judgment than their husbands. Every afflicted woman who applies to the magistrate for relief from the sot who curses her home is flying in the face of Paul. "My dear woman," the magistrate should say, "your request is very reasonable, but it is very unorthodox. Go home and read the fifth chapter of Ephesians where you will see that wives must obey their husbands in everything."

It is pleasant to find some of our religious leaders have not forgotten that there are others in the shape of men and women whose taste and general feelings do not run side by side with Church people. Here is the Rev. J. Pringle, of St. Ninian's, who has declared that he agrees with those who wish cinemas to be opened on Sundays. He says: "I am a democrat, and I do not believe in trying to get people into Church by shutting down pubs and everything else. I believe sufficiently in my way of life to allow the alternatives side by side." This was said to a representative, recently, of the "Daily Record." It is rather a pity that Mr. Pringle is a parson. It seems a waste of good material.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## THE BRADFORD TROUBLE

WE promised to give an account of the attack on the N.S.S. at Bradford!

The first intimation of trouble in the Bradford Branch N.S.S., came when the Executive received information in November, 1946, that Mr. F. J. Corina had moved a resolution at a branch meeting that the Bradford Branch secede from the Parent Society and continue to function as a separate Society.

As the Executive is the only body with the power to create or dissolve branches, the situation called for immediate attention.

Mr. Corina admitted to the Executive that he had moved the resolution on behalf of Mr. Mitchell, and was in agreement with it, and that the resolution had been adjourned for a further meeting of the branch.

The Executive at once called a meeting of all the members of the Bradford Branch to meet representatives of the Executive, and the General Secretary, Messrs. Griffiths and Seibert, went to Bradford for that purpose. At the last moment, the serious illness of Mrs. Cohen prevented me from going, but I felt the matter was in good hands and results proved I was correct.

It was made clear to all present at that meeting that the resolution was an outrageous one. That if Mr. Corina and his friends wished to form a separate organisation, all that was necessary was for them to leave the N.S.S. and start their own Society, if they could. That was a clean way of going to work.

Mr. Corina said that, in spite of what the Executive had said he was determined to go on with the resolution, and warned the Executive that if they took any action against him he would take 95 per cent. of the northern members of the N.S.S. away from the Society.

Any Executive of the N.S.S. at any time, which submitted to that sort of conduct would be unworthy of the Society and its traditions.

On December 19, 1946, Messrs. F. J. Corina and R. B. Mitchell were expelled from the N.S.S. by the Executive on the grounds of their declared intention to destroy the Bradford Branch, N.S.S. If they had resigned from the N.S.S. they had a perfect right to form another Society, but it was a dishonest act for members of the N.S.S. to try to destroy a branch.

Naturally some members of the branch were misled, and two of Mr. Corina's friends were induced to enter into a court action claiming the assets of the branch consisting of the books, literature and funds of the branch, and claiming

£50 damages from Mr. Baldie and from Mr. Searle, who were the properly elected officials of the branch.

It was a foolish thing to do and the case was heard in the Bradford County Court on March 11, and judgment, with costs, were given in favour of Messrs. Baldie and Searle.

During the case, the judge suggested the possibility of a settlement by arrangement. It was a kindly suggestion, but we were not dealing with kindly men, and nothing short of unconditional recognition by the plaintiffs that Messrs. Baldie and Searle were the proper officials of the branch was acceptable to us; and so the case went to judgment, with the result as stated above.

We have to thank Messrs. Day, Baldie and Searle for the cheerful manner in which they met all the extra work falling on them in connection with the trouble, and we heard excellent reports of the conduct of our witnesses in the box. They were Messrs. Day, Baldie, Searle and Mrs. Laycock.

The Executive of the Society has always defended members of the N.S.S. when attacks have come from Christians: the unsavoury thing in this case is that it was necessary to defend branch officials against an attack from fellow Freethinkers and colleagues in the same N.S.S. branch.

I did not attend the Court, but Mr. R. H. Rosetti, the General Secretary of the N.S.S., held a watching brief; he has been of great service in this matter.

Fuller details will appear in the Executive's Annual Report, which will be read at the Annual Conference at Whitsun, and afterwards circulated to all members of the N.S.S.

CHAPMAN COHEN,  
President N.S.S.

## SUGAR PLUMS

The Bradford Branch N.S.S., that is, those who remained loyal to Messrs. Day, Baldie and Searle as the proper officials of the Branch, will commence open-air work to-day (Sunday) in the Broadway Car Park. We believe Mr. H. Day, the Branch Chairman, will be the speaker, but we have not been informed as to the time. The Branch is keen to get on with the work of Freethought and it is hoped that those who consider the cause more important than individuals will give their support to the meetings.

The West London Branch National Secular Society concludes its successful syllabus of indoor meetings with a lecture by Mr. F. A. Hornbrook on "Freethought, Religion, and Politics," to-day (April 4) at 7-15 at the "Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.

## GHOSTS.

MADAME DE STAEL said, "I do not believe in ghosts, but I am afraid of them." Probably there are millions who would say the same thing if they had the wit. The belief in ghosts is dying out, but the fear of them survives. Our intellects have not yet impressed their sanity on our nerves. Darkness and mystery still disturb our imaginations, and evoke physical reminiscences of ancient times. Within the clear light of consciousness we are ourselves, but beyond that we are automatic legacies of the past. Our ancestors, as Emerson said, are potted within us. When we act, they are moving us. It is the inevitable law of mortmain. Our forefathers rule us from their tombs, and many of the weird thrills we experience, in situations that millenniums ago roused the barbarous terror which is the nurse of superstition, are caused by the charnel breath of their sepulchres sweeping through our sensitive frames.

My personal experience on this subject is worthless. I know that very ignorant people in towns, and bucolic minds in sequestered villages, have a deep-seated faith in ghosts. I have met educated men and women who dislike conversation about them, and others who frankly shared Madame De Stael's sentiment. A few—a very few—I have met who were entirely superior to the superstition. Does not this show how powerful is inheritance? Does it not warn us that the follies of barbaric ages, the delusions of the ages of faith, must be strenuously repudiated by our minds, lest they assert themselves in our blood?

In my tender childhood I listened to ghost stories before the winter fire till it was a horror to leave the room. Frequently I crawled upstairs to bed with my eyes shut tight, fearing that if I opened them I might behold a grisly shade. For years I lived next door to a haunted house. Some persons asserted that the ghost still roamed at midnight, which appears to be the hour when the spirits take exercise, as we further perceive in Shakespeare's "'Tis now the very witching time of night." Other persons, however, asserted that the ghost had been "laid", no one could say exactly when, by a clergyman who encountered it at the critical moment, and drove it underground with a chapter of the Bible. That ghost was the subject of my dreams. Yet I never saw it, nor indeed any other, although I watched for its appearance by the hour with a fearful fascination.

On one occasion, however, I made sure I had *felt* a ghost. Our family was residing a few miles from Plymouth, and I slept by myself in a room at the top of the house. Several miles beyond us lived my uncle's family. He was a farmer, and his eldest son used to attend the Plymouth market. One evening, as my cousin was returning home, he took supper at our house, and being exceedingly tired, he rested there, intending to proceed home in the morning. The only available bed was mine, and he was put into it. I was out with other boys that evening, and when I returned at an unconscionable hour for an urchin of eight, I sneaked into the passage, and persuaded one of my sisters to let me scurry off to bed so as to avoid a storm. In the hurry she forgot to tell me of my cousin's visit, and I slipped upstairs in the dark. I undressed myself, and the bed being high, I took my usual running leap upon it. Horror of horrors! Instead of descending on a flat counterpane, I alighted on a living form. Quick as lightning, I jumped off, opened the door, and fled downstairs, followed by the dreadful presence, which I concluded was old Nick himself. The whole family met me at the bottom of the stair, where I rushed into my mother's arms shouting, "The Devil, the Devil!"

A famous spectre, far more so than the one I lived next door to, was the Cock Lane Ghost. Johnson's credulity as to this supernatural visitor seems to have been an invention of his enemies. Belief in the Cock Lane Ghost was very general in London in 1763, and Churchill satirizes Johnson as one of the dupes. But, according to Boswell, the great lexicographer sat on the committee of investigation, which proved the whole thing a fraud. It is obvious, however, that Johnson did believe in the reality of ghosts, although he appears to have been stricter than other superstitionists in his notions of evidence.

That Shakespeare believed in ghosts I think is untenable. The ghosts in his plays are mere "stuff o' the mind." He employs them as accessories to heighten the interest of the drama, but he never lets them affect the natural development of the plot; and, what is more remarkable, he makes them visible or invisible, audible or inaudible, to suit his purpose. The ghost in *Hamlet* is seen by the fated son and his friends, yet in the closet scene, while Hamlet sees and hears it, his mother sees and hears nothing. Similarly, Banquo's ghost is only perceptible to Macbeth. When "the great magician, bold Glendower," boasts that he can "call spirits from the vasty deep," Harry Hotspur answers: "Why, so can I, or so can any man, but will they come when you do call for them?" Shakespeare's philosophy of the subject can be summed up in one of his own phrases—"Such tricks hath strong imagination."

Ghosts are falling out of fashion in the present age. They still appear at Spiritist seances, but if any person has the courage to seize them they turn out to be solid flesh and blood. When superstition is reduced to a trade, it is a miserable mixture of trickery and dupery.

Ghosts never trouble sceptics. Their visits are always confined to believers. Nor do they appear in the daylight. They flit about, like bats, in the dark. A haunted house is sure to be more or less sequestered. Nobody hears of one in a busy thoroughfare. A ghost in the Strand would be a case for the police. Sometimes a ghost proves to be a rank imposture. There was one of this kind a few years ago in Texas. It used to spring up on the wall of a graveyard and frighten the passers-by; indeed, its uncanny presence soon produced a perfect reign of terror. But one night it popped out on the wrong man. He drew his revolver and took a potshot at the obtrusive spirit, who dropped to the earth with a groan, and was presently taken to the hospital.

The belief in ghosts is the beginning of religion; yes, and the end of it, too, for the first and second childhoods are very similar. The only difference between the savage and the civilized, in this respect, is that the former expects to see ghosts any night, while the latter only expects to see them after he is dead. The essence of religion, in both cases, is ghostology.

Gods themselves are only ghosts. They are the chiefs, but they cannot survive their tribe. *Ghost* (Anglo-Saxon *gast*, German *geist*) originally meant breath or air, like the Latin *spiritus* or the Greek *pneuma*. The Holy Ghost is literally Holy Wind; in other words, nothing but gas. The true Holy Ghost, therefore, is pure air; in which I believe as devoutly as any Christian. It is life and health and hope and joy. "Come Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire," is a capital prayer when you understand it in the right sense. The Churches had always misunderstood it. They have built grand and costly edifices devoted them to the service of God, and consecrated them to the name and by the power of the Holy Ghost. These imposing structures have been adorned with stained-glass windows, depicting some incident or episode of the Christian superstition; and millions of worshippers have felt a rapture of devotion as they saw the sunlight streaming through the storied panes, and kindling all their red and purple glories. Yet the splendid houses of God often threw their shadows (and do so still) over squalid hovels or fetid slums. How much better it were, if the choice must be made, to lose the glorious temples and gain the happy homes; to lose the red and purple glories of storied windows, and gain the crimson of glowing health on the faces of humankind.

G. W. FOOTE.

#### MISSIONARIES IN CHINA

But if toleration be the note of Chinese polity—concerning religion alone, but almost every matter affecting government—it may be asked, what is it in the propagation of Christianity that excites the hostility of people and rulers? It is that the missionaries present themselves to Chinese view as the instruments of powerful nations bent on the ruin of the empire. They enter the country with a talisman of extra-territoriality; their persons are sacred: the law of the land cannot lay hands on them. That is the first stage. The second is, that they seek to extra-territorialise their converts also, whose battle they fight in the provincial courts and in the rustic communes, and so make it of material advantage to the people to bear the banner of the Cross. Many missionaries are really zealous in the work of alienating the Chinese from their natural allegiance, and of encouraging them to seek the protection of foreign Powers against the native authorities.—A. MIENE.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

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IF I WERE A SAVAGE!

If I were a Savage—  
 I would sing in open spaces,  
 I would dance in sun-lit places,  
 And my tissue would not be so adipose.  
 I would never wake each morning  
 Lazy, livery and yawning,  
 Nor would I wear glass windows on my nose.  
 I'd go naked in December,  
 I would hunt, though not a member  
 Of the Quorn or other huntin' class.  
 I would not pay rates and taxes  
 But behead all Mayors with axes,  
 And their Corporations I would club *en masse*.  
 When in hunger I would hanker  
 After book-maker and banker—  
 They are such a nice fat-bellied little lot.  
 In a stew they might get slimmer  
 And I'd watch them gently simmer,  
 With some sage and onions; then serve piping hot!  
 As for Politicians, bless you,  
 They would never more address you  
 Or give promises they did not mean to keep.  
 I would wake them from their slumbers  
 And soon decimate their numbers  
 By cremation on a muck-heap—quick and cheap.  
 Those small boys with running noses  
 Who throw stones and pinch my roses—  
 Right round the rugged rock I'd make 'em run  
 Till their feet were sore with blisters,  
 And their silly giggling sisters—  
 Well, I'd throw them to the crocodiles for fun!  
 As for wives, I'd not be rationed,  
 But I'd choose 'em *fully fashioned*;  
 Any nagging ones I'd par-boil in a pot.  
 All gold-diggers I would hit on  
 That pink portion which they sit on;  
 And all Income Tax Collectors would be shot.  
 Every "in-law" would be outlawed  
 Or secularly bound with stout cord,  
 And deposited to feed some hungry shark.  
 At the greedy, grabbing Grocer  
 Big hard coconuts I'd throw, Sir,  
 Till he learned to count my change right in the dark.  
 As for landladies and such-like  
 I would keep them in a hutch like  
 Guinea pigs—for so they are, except a few;  
 And I'd feed them on a trifle  
 Of neat poison just to stifle  
 Their propensity for serving hash and stew.  
 Oh, I could go on for ages,  
 Filling pages and more pages  
 With the things I'd like to do—but why should I?  
 It is merely idle chatter,  
 And it really cannot matter—  
 I'm *no Savage*—so I'd better say "Good-bye!"

W. H. WOOD.

POOR GOD

Talking about blasphemy reminds us how profane are many of the titles of popular books. Here are a few we remember off-hand: "God's Gentlemen," "God's Fool," "If I Were God," "The Wheel of God," "God's Outcast," "God Forsaken," "In the Image of God," "God and the Ant," etc.

**MATERIALISM RESTATED.** Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.  
**SPEAKING FOR MYSELF.** By Lady (Robert) Simon. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dr. C. E. M. JOAD REPLIES

SIR,—There now, Mr. Wood, you have drawn me!  
 Having made you a handsome present of the admission and the fact, I propose to answer your question and to ask you one.

If you postulate a creative mind in order to create the material world, what, you want to know, are you going to postulate to create the creative mind? Who, in fact, created God?

You will find the question come together with half a dozen more rather difficult ones in Chapter II of my book, "God and Evil," which I recommend to anybody who really wants to know how the anti-theistic position should be stated. Really you Freethinkers don't know your own business! For the question that Mr. Wood has chosen isn't really so very difficult after all. For (1) though we can't conceive matter creating anything, we can not only conceive but actually experience creation of mind. A man experiences creation of mind whenever he writes a poem or an article for the "Freethinker," and whenever, as now, he replies to it in a letter.

(It also happens, alas, when a mind conceives and invents something like the internal combustion engine.)

(2) We know that matter is not immortal for, in the case of material things, we can see them being made and we can also see them being destroyed; see bodies, for example, turning into worms. (Matter is indestructible, did I hear you say? Not a bit of it. It was, no doubt, in the nineteenth century, but those who think freely must permit their free enquiries to embrace the nature of the twentieth century atom.)

On the other hand, we don't *know* that mind *may* not be both immortal and uncreated; we have no evidence on the subject one way or the other, since we have never seen a thought go out of existence. Hence, the difficulty which exists in the case of uncreated matter is not quite so great in the case of uncreated mind.

Having answered your question, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of asking you one, or rather two, in return.

(i) Why do you always assume that when a man changes his views he does so from interested motives, or why, if you don't assume it, do you, nevertheless, contrive to imply it?

(ii) Or is it only in regard to a change from views which you do hold to views which you don't, that you make this assumption and suggest this implication? Does it never occur to you that a man might *honestly* disagree with you?—Yours, etc.,

C. E. M. JOAD.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Ethical Aspects of American Thought and Life." G. E. O'DELL.

West London Branch N.S.S. ("Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Freethought, Religion and Politics." Mr. F. A. Hornsbrook.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture. Mr. H. Day.

Nottingham (Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture. Mr. T. M. Mosley.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m. Mr. A. Saxms, and others.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Body and Mind." Mr. H. SEARLE.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Stream of Life." C. McCALL.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. G. THOMPSON (Liverpool): "The Stream of Life."

## THE CHALLENGE

I AM gratified that my short article has aroused Mr. Wood to reply, but regret that its effect has not only been lost on him, but appears to have reinforced his convictions.

At the risk of still further entrenching his ideas I will make reply.

My fine-sounding words and lyricism were for effect and to contrast against the gloomy and sepulchral tone of his essay. I think that in that I may find myself in good company.

"Let each man and each nation strive to be the best." I can only underline my original statement. What exactly does Mr. Wood propose as an alternative? Mediocrity? It is not a bad thing that a schoolboy endeavours to excel in his studies or his athletics. Mr. Wood would teach him to curb his enthusiasm and ability to that of the lowest member of the form. His new Commandment is "Thou shalt not excel." None would dare to be top of the form and all would be placed together. There would be no promotion, and with no promotion, no learning, with no learning no education; without education ignorance would be rife. With ignorance, superstition would blossom with all its vile and evil consequences. Religion would boom and the priesthood would hail Mr. Wood as their new Messiah.

Since it may be assumed that the contrary is desired, I suggest that my proposal, being the opposite to that of Mr. Wood's, is more than likely to have the right effect. If this is accepted, then "striving to be the best" or "endeavouring to excel" are good maxims and a boy should be so encouraged. And if the boy, why not then the man? Or does Mr. Wood suggest that education should be suddenly cut off like a switch clicking out the light?

This is so patently absurd that I make no comment and proceed on the assumption that a man also should strive to do his best (!) From that point the logical sequence follows that if a man tries to do his best and be the best, then a family also will try; if a family, then a village, then a town, so a county, and so a country. This, sighs Mr. Wood, leads directly to war. It is regrettable, but a study of history shows this to be true. However, before descending into the depths of misery and despair, let us examine the situation.

In the dawn of man's career on earth doubtless the struggle was individually fierce and bloody. A later increase in reasoning faculties showed him that organisation into groups or tribes produced a stronger and better way of overcoming enemies. A tribe, subjugating another, would absorb it; this simple process which needs no explanation, led directly to the countries of to-day, none of which exist but by reason of amalgamation by force. Scotland, England and Wales fought to make Great Britain; even the United States warred for their independence and ultimate unification. We may deplore the method whilst approving the result, but a lifetime of lamentation will not change the facts.

Mr. Wood would have us control all emotions and eliminate all strife, this arduous task to be placed on the backs of our "perambulating statesmen." But statesmen do not control destinies, Mr. Wood. They are controlled by them; they are the figureheads and mouthpieces of the tribe.

I am accused of having a dream-life. Far better that than the nightmare existence of a mind tortured by all that is bad and evil in life. "Two men looked out through prison bars; the one saw mud, the other stars!"

Does Mr. Wood seriously suggest that to-day, for example, because of the risk of war in international affairs, Britain should abandon her claims and possessions to any other nation who desired them? Pacifism has to be preached to and practised by

both sides. Where would the Persian oilfields be if we could not defend them? Where would the great farmlands of Australia and Africa be if left to the "reason of nations"? England itself would starve and perish; but I presume that Mr. Wood would at least die happily in the knowledge that his idea had been successful in that its adoption had at last removed him from this life in which he finds so much trouble and pain.

Mr. Wood is guilty of self delusion and inaccurate adolescent reasoning. He has projected his mind into the future where he paints to himself a glowing picture of what the world might be and imagines that what can be done in theory can be achieved in fact. He has then reached back down the ages and his sensitive mind, appalled at the ghastly picture of war, torture, famine and death which each have laid their share of scars on the edifice of civilisation, has refused to consider their contribution to the next course. We can do without them he says. Unfortunately, not so; not until the building is completed. The paradox of life is seen in all its satiric display.

I cannot conclude without reference to Mr. Wood's amazement at my joy in life in these troublesome times. If he will re-read my essay, he may note that I almost entirely mentioned unrationed goods! With the exception of food and drink (which may be all the more enjoyed when they are obtained), surely Mr. Wood does not find a shortage of sport or chess, of books of music, theatres, films? They comprise my list, excepting books of women; of that Mr. Wood is for himself more qualified to speak than I!

This is the Great Age of Curiosity; an age when men search each one for the new Philosopher's stone which now shall give a meaning to life, a plan and goal for the mind. It is our duty and privilege to help those who, lost and rudderless on the stream of life, career about lacking purpose or ambition; unhappy futile throng for whom we must find a plan and make a goal. Despair will not help. Only hope, courage, drive and clear thinking will achieve the end. Come, Mr. Wood, join the force in this new battle for humanity.

DAVID MOORE

## DIVINE SLANG

Marmontel, in his youth, much sought the society of old Boindin, who was famous for his wit and his scepticism. The old man made an appointment with him at the Café Procope. "But we cannot speak there on philosophic matters." "Oh, yes, by means of a special language, a kind of argot." Then they made us a vocabulary: the soul was called *Margot*; religion, *Jarrot*; liberty, *Jeanneton*; and God the Father, *M. de l'Être*. A man dressed in black, with an unpleasant countenance, joined in the conversation, and said to Boindin, "Sir, may I venture to tell you who is that M. de l'Être that behaves himself so badly, and gives you such dissatisfaction?" "Sir," replied Boindin, "he was a police spy." One can imagine the roars of laughter, the man being himself in that profession.—CHAMFORT.

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