

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVIII.—No. 21

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Empire of the Dead

"The tyranny exercised over men's minds is the only real tyranny, because it cannot be fought against. Tiberius, Ghengis Khan, and Napoleon were assuredly redoubtable tyrants, but from the depths of their graves Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed have exerted over the human mind a far profounder despotism. A conspiracy may overthrow a tyrant; but what can it avail against a firmly-established belief? The only real tyrants that humanity has known have always been the memories of its dead, or the illusions it has forged for itself."—G. LE BOU, "The Crowd."

It was one of the many pregnant sayings of Auguste Comte that the power of the dead over the living increases with the passing of each generation. By wills and bequests, by institutions and ideas, by the very physical structure we inherit, the past lives again in our own activities. We hand on and administer property more in accord with the desires of the past than the needs of the present, just as we take from the same quarter our rules of social decorum, and look with contemptuous indignation at all who are bold enough to flout its decrees. It is thus that every reformer has to fight, not only the vested interests now existing, but away and beyond these, the dead weight of custom and tradition, without which the contest might be quickly decided. From the cradle to the grave we find ourselves swathed, more or less thoroughly, in corpse clothes, ruled over by a skeleton dynasty, bound to the past by chains that gain from their invisibility.

Nor is this tyranny of the dead over the living exercised only by those who were tyrants over the living in their days, far from it. It is mainly the influence of those who stood as reformers to their own generation that acts as obstacle to reform to-day. The selfish, the bad, the indolent, are themselves monuments to their own defects, and we are warned accordingly, but the unselfish, the good, the industrious, by the possession of these qualities, cast a glamour over after generations of criticism, difficult or abortive, and losing the real lessons of their lives, we foolishly perpetuate their teachings, instead of emulating the spirit that dictated their actions.

Of course it may be said that the rule of the dead is not always bad, and the increasing intelligence of man may make it less so. If the past dominates, it also guides him on to the completion of his work, while the same channel that transmits evil tendencies and noxious institutions also gives us the clearer brain, wider knowledge, and stronger love of right. And this is true; but we may conveniently distinguish between the past ruling and the past guiding the present. The dead can only be said to really rule, when we uphold institutions for no better reason than

that they have always been in existence. To adopt existing institutions because examination shows them to be consonant with present-day requirements is not to be ruled by the dead, but to consciously embody in our lives the projects of their successes and the lessons of their failures. It is thus that the influence of the past becomes either a blessing or a curse, just as we permit ourselves to be taught by its experiences or coerced by its decrees.

But as is always the case when one wishes to find examples of fossilised ideas, of customs that have survived beyond their period of social utility, or the beliefs that express a lower stage of civilisation than the one in which we live, one turns to the field of religion. Naturally so, for religion represents the past rather than the present, never for a moment facing the position that it is the reliability of these instincts that is called into question. For when we find educated men and women holding to the beliefs in miracles, in virgin births, the doctrine of hell with all the paraphernalia of contemporary religion, then we are fully warranted in saying that this is merely the uncivilised or less civilised past impressing itself upon the more civilised present. These beliefs are neither suggested by our experience nor verified by our observation; and one can safely predict that given a generation of men and women armed with the modern weapons of modern knowledge and unacquainted with Christian beliefs, not one of them, if suddenly called upon to examine these beliefs would consider them worthy of credence for a single moment.

It is a matter of plain observation that a people never originate their religion in the same sense that they originate their scientific or sociological opinions. True one can trace a long ancestry for all our ideas, but in science we add something to the labours of our predecessors even while discarding many of the ideas as untruthful. In religious matters, on the contrary, we seldom add, the usual task is to limit—that certainly has been the case during the past five centuries. The work of each generation has been to take something away from the stock of religious ideas they have inherited, until, as a result of this process, we see with advanced (?) Christians the Bible reduced to a mere fragment of a whole set of semitic traditions, inaccurate in science, history and ethics, the doctrine of hell dismissed as a piece of unbearable barbarism, God Almighty reduced to a kind-of-a-sort-of-a-something, which shows aptly enough the power the dead still wield over the living.

In brief, we need not look far afield to find evidence of the existence of this empire of the dead; and while, as I have said, its rule is not necessarily an evil one, it may easily become so unless wisely regulated. The great lesson for man to learn, and the one he finds most difficult to master, is that, while each generation may have to deal with what are fundamentally the same problems, yet their

precise form constantly varies, and consequently demands new solutions. In this respect the past is a valuable book for guidance, but it becomes nought but evil when we attempt to rule our lives by its decrees. Our debt to the past is truly a heavy one, but we are neither profiting by its experience nor fulfilling our duty to the present and the future in seeking to perpetuate its customs and ideas without reference to contemporary knowledge and requirements. It is the life of the present that demands our attention, the problems of to-day that are pressing for solution. And if these problems are to be satisfactorily and profitably solved, it can only be by trying all our ideas at the touchstone of modern knowledge, and testing all our institutions by their ability to develop a higher and nobler generation of human beings.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE MACHINATIONS OF THE PARDONERS

PUNISHMENTS for sins among the faithful in the Roman fold were originally severe. Fasting and mortification of the flesh were prolonged inflictions. But, as time went on, the penalties were relaxed and corporal punishments and the recitation of Psalms on bended knees sufficed for expiation. Then, at the sacrifice of 100 shillings to be given in alms, the sinner escaped all the penalties once imposed by the Church.

Naturally, laymen who could afford it preferred a money payment, and the sums thus collected were frequently devoted to the social services of the period, and helped in the erection and reconstruction of churches. Indeed, at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II removed all punishments from those who were willing to journey to Jerusalem to combat the Moslem intruder.

Then, by degrees, commutation was replaced by what was termed the theory of the treasury, for, as indulgencies were more and more granted for prayers and payments by the clergy, some other system became necessary in order to justify the easy escape for those guilty of the most heinous offences. So there emerged the theory that sinners were not justified by their own merits, but by those of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints. These merits, it was alleged, were infinite and formed "an inexhaustible 'treasury', the dispensation of which rested with the Pope and the clergy." This assumption was widely accepted, and acted upon, before it was officially sanctioned. Then, as Jusserand states: "In a Bull of 1350, Pope Clement VI explains that the merits of Christ are infinite, and the merits of the Virgin and the Saints superabundant. This excess of unemployed merit has been constituted into a treasury, 'not one that is deposited in a strong room, or concealed in a field, but which is to be usefully distributed to the faithful, through the Blessed Peter, Keeper of Heaven's Gate, and his successors.' However largely employed, there ought to be 'no fear of an absorption or diminution of the treasury, first on account of the infinite merits of Christ . . . then, because the more numerous are the people reclaimed through the use of its contents, the more is it augmented by the addition of their merits.' It must be admitted that such being the case no doubt the treasury would never be found empty, since the more was drawn from it, the more it grew."

With all this opulence at its command, no wonder Christendom was soon overrun by a veritable army of pardoners officially authorised to sell indulgences to all who were willing to purchase. They wandered from place to place, displaying their relics and selling their pardons. Nor did the authorised vendors stand alone, for the traffic proved so lucrative that students from the schools and others soon entered into competition. Chaucer held

these impostors up to ridicule and derision and, as the money obtained by the intruders all went into their own pockets, Pope Boniface IX complained that they traded without ecclesiastical licence, although they professed to be accredited from the Court of Rome. "Certain religious," avers the Pope, "who even belong to different mendicant orders, and some secular clerks, occasionally advanced in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, affirm that they are sent by us or by the legates or the nuncios of the Apostolic See, and that they have received the mission to treat of certain affairs . . . to receive money for us and the Roman Church and they go about the country under these pretexts."

Despite their unabashed knavery, the pardoners were popular. They readily released their clients from their most solemn vows, and relieved them from all penances for ready money. Whatever moral obligations were imposed upon the people by the clergy were easily swept aside by pardoners' parchments. These pious parasites must have obtained what, for the time, were enormous sums of money, for which the Pope indignantly declares they give no account to anyone. And, in addition to their other sins: "They allow heretics to re-enter the bosom of the Church, illegitimate children to take holy orders, they take off excommunications, interdicts; in short, as their power comes from themselves alone, nothing forces them to restrain it and they take it fully and without stint."

Although the authorised pardoners rendered their payments to the Papal exchequer, the many interlopers serenely continued to trade for themselves alone. The Bishop of Durham in 1340 stigmatised them as bold, bad men who while "openly making game of our power, distribute indulgences to the people, dispense with the execution of vows, absolve the perjured, homicide, usurers and other sinners who confess to them; and for a little money paid, grant remission for crimes ill-atoned for, and are given to a multitude of other abuses."

Unlicensed practitioners were therefore to be prevented by vicars and curates from officiating in their churches, either as preachers or confessors. As money was not always available, the pardoners took silver spoons, brooches, rings or other articles of value, so it was ordained that "the money and any other valuables found on their persons must be surrendered." But the bogus pardoners easily circumvented their assailants by employing subordinate agents, and their plausible stories and forged credentials secured their ascendancy over the minds of the credulous populace who were only too pleased to be released from religious trammels on earth, with a full prospect of easy entrance into heaven.

But as Jusserand observes, pious imposture and duplicity were not confined to common pardoners. He notes that "Walsingham relates with indignation the conduct of a cardinal who made a stay in England in order to negotiate a marriage between Richard II and the emperor's sister. For money, the prelate, like the pardoners, took off excommunications, dispensed with pilgrimages . . . and had the sum that would have been spent on the journey given to him, according to an estimate, and it is much to be regretted from every point of view, that this curious tariff of the expenses of a journey has not come down to us."

When their honesty was questioned or credentials queried, the pardoners fabricated documents which purported to prove that they had been granted immunities which enabled them to dispense with Apostolic letters. The money offerings for masses which would have been received by the parish clergy frequently found its way into the pardoners' purses, while they actually, in some instances, obtained "a condemnation against the priest who had tried to do his duty by them, and even succeeded in having him excommunicated: which, of course, became a cause of great merriment among the unholy tribe."

The scandal became so glaring that even the University of Oxford, recommended in 1414, the complete suppression of the pardoners, but nothing was done, and the pardoners became more shameless and prodigal than ever.

In addition to indulgences, the pardoners traded in relics. They asserted that in the course of their pilgrimages they had collected holy bones and fragments of every description. But while the better informed scoffed at these stories, the multitude eagerly accepted them. At Exeter a piece "of the candle which the Angel of the Lord lit in Christ's tomb" was exhibited. Another venerated relic was part of the bush from which Jehovah spoke to Moses. Even kings, including Henry III of pious memory, and the warlike Edward III, encouraged these impositions.

Jusserand notes that: "The pardoners lived merrily; certainly after a well occupied day they must have been cheerful companions at the inn. The thought of the multitude of sins they had remitted, of excommunications they had taken off, of penalties which they had commuted—themselves simple vagabonds menaced with the gallows—the knowledge of their impunity, the singularity of their existence, the triumphant success of those mad harangues which gave them the keys of heaven, must have made their hearts swell inconceivably with course brutal merriment."

Throughout Western Europe the pardoners preyed on their dupes for some centuries, for the people, as a whole, were sunk in baleful superstition and were ever attracted to the marvellous. So the pardoners lingered until they were suppressed by the Council of Trent in 1562, during the pontificate of Pius IV. This ecumenical Council then decided that "no further hope can be entertained of amending" such pardoners. Consequently, "the use of them and their name are entirely banished henceforth in all Christendom."

T. F. PALMER.

THANK GOD FOR THE B.B.C.!

LISTENING-IN to the Brains Trust the other evening I was amused, but certainly not impressed, by the well-disciplined behaviour of the three functioning Trustees. One could almost sense that correct parade-ground atmosphere with the small company goose-stepping under the eagle eye of Sergeant Major B.B.C.! But so thoroughly had they been rehearsed and drilled that not one of them stepped off with the wrong foot or otherwise incurred their instructor's displeasure.

Not one slip was made—not that the listener would know anyway, because the Brains Trust is always a recorded programme; which only shows just how much the B.B.C. really trusts the Brains Trust! Should a speaker so far forget himself as to say the wrong thing the record would be instantly scrapped and a corrected version made forthwith. So very simple and—straight-forward, isn't it?

In the course of answering one of the usual silly questions it came to pass that all three members heartily denounced the wicked hypocrisy of prohibiting State lotteries in this country. Yet not one of them dared to give the reason why lotteries could not be permitted—and so relieve the poor overburdened taxpayer! Of course, they knew the reason—everyone knows it—but they also knew that the B.B.C. would never allow the reason to be stated over the air.

Now you see what I mean when I call them well-trained and disciplined. The Sergeant Major was there all the time, ready and waiting to pounce at the first misdemeanour. But surely the entire programme is rendered futile and ridiculous when the whole truth cannot be spoken. When the B.B.C. pays the pipers (with our money) it also takes very good care to call the tune—and to muzzle and gag all those it employs. At least those who are willing to stand for it!

If the Brains Trust is supposed to be an honest form of entertainment then why cannot its members say just what they want to say? And why do they bother to rail against the prohibition of State lotteries if they have not the guts to rail against the

intolerance of the Christian Church, which alone is responsible for that prohibition? It is the narrow-minded, power-minded dignitaries of the Church who dictate the policy of our State. Because they choose to see evil in everything they arrogantly and selfishly deny our hospitals—and suffering humanity—the benefits that a State lottery could provide.

How much longer must we sit silent and scared, like little children in the class-room, while these self-righteous and self-interested busybodies dictate to the millions just what they shall and shall not do? Why must the wishes of the masses count for nothing while the will of a few priests remains supreme?

We all know the feeble and flimsy excuse the Church always puts forward—the gross immorality of winning a fortune by the expenditure of a few shillings! The State must never become a party to such wickedness; and to relieve taxation by such a sinful method is something too frightful to countenance. Only a devil-ridden people would tolerate such hideousness—despite the fact that England is about the only civilised country in the world where lotteries are illegal!

The State can—and does—make millions from the duty imposed on drink and tobacco; yet the Church quite conveniently overlooks this fact. The State also makes millions by means of entertainment tax from music halls, cinemas and all the rest of the Church's "haunts of vice", but the Wheel of Fortune—No! No! That is much too shocking!

So, like a blood-sucking leech the Church hangs on desperately to its last remaining succulent sin—the Sweepstake. A mere handful of Mourful Meanies inhibiting and condemning the sporting instinct of a nation; Ah, well, St. George may have destroyed the dragon but he could never have destroyed this Giant Octopus, now so ably defended by the B.B.C.

What does the Church care if we are taxed almost out of existence, so long as we do not relieve taxation by the method that would benefit both State and Charity, in addition to the lucky winners? What does it care for the overwhelming vote of the majority so long as the long-faced minority retains its despotic power?

And so, dear friends, all we now have to do is to fall down on our sagging knees and thank God for the B.B.C. The Broadcasting Company Sergeant Major is always with us on the Radio Parade Ground to see that no one gets out of step with the Church and Christianity. And if you expect any member of the Brains Trust to have the courage to speak his mind freely and fearlessly then you have another think coming! With his mouth muzzled and his brain securely bound he is a helpless, if well-paid, little puppet who is pleased to dance on the end of a piece of string.

But, to me, he is not a very edifying spectacle!

W. H. WOOD.

To my certain knowledge, there actually are devout Catholics of both sexes, well known and highly esteemed—weekly communicants, and leading lives devoted to charity and religion—who believe Joseph to have been the real and natural father of Jesus. . . I know also priests who share this opinion.—Prof. MIVART.

Just Published

"Christianity and Ethics"

By CHAPMAN COHEN

No. 18. Pamphlets for the People

Price 2d.

Postage 1d.

From PIONEER PRESS, 41, Gray's Inn Rd., W.C.1

ACID DROPS

The Bishop of Rochester says that Russia is encouraging the development of both Communism and Religion. Of the first, we should not be surprised; Communism may fit in with many forms of religion, and in that case Russia may make use of it. The two, religion and Communism, have often run together, both in Russia, America, and even back to ancient times. The Russian revolutionists never claimed to do away with religion by acts of law. Their object was to see that religion would not interfere with State purposes. We are not, then, surprised if Russia even encourages some help given to religion if it pays—for a time.

There are joys, real joys, among the clergy of Abergavenny. It is good Christian joy that is being shown, for nothing will please good Christians better than helping to make other people miserable. In this case, it was a question of Sunday "shows", and only about 20 voters came out. The result was that the good went to Church while the others felt lonely, and kindly Christians decided if they did not want to have a "show" on Sunday, they should have one. The clergy know they cannot get a full show, but they will have a miserable one.

Perhaps the most impudent of claims is the Christian claim that Christianity is to bring "Peace on earth and goodwill to all men." When was that manifested? Certainly not within known historic times. The variety of Pagan gods was no more reasonable than one god. But they were more tolerant than Christianity ever was, or ever will be. What the Christian religion wanted was to clear off the other gods and force respect for the Christian god which, on analogy, is as foolish as any deity that ever bemuddled the mind of man. In early times the trail of Christianity was that of brutality, cruelty and stupidity. The peace that the Christian world longed for, and fought for, and suppressed for, was an early specimen of Hitlerism.

Two years ago, the Bishop of Liverpool appointed a Commission to survey the state of religion, and to advise certain lines for a betterment of the Christian situation. According to a Liverpool paper, the present situation is "a battle with unfaith in its three forms, 'Unfaith, Atheism, Inertia and Ignorance.'" Another feature is "The forces of the Church are handicapped because so many of her members are unaware that any fight is in progress, and they are ill-equipped for the struggle."

That is about the nicest mixture of artfulness and obvious foolishness that one could frame. We know, as everyone knows, that the situation of the vast majority of Christians was very bad. But it was obvious that at the beginning of the eighteenth century the people were getting restless, and, with men such as Thomas Paine about, anything might happen. The people were beginning to waken, but we may give a skeleton illustration of how the Churches helped. First, the Methodist Church, then getting numerous and stronger, had forbidden its members to take part in social movements. From the Church there came this, we are giving a few lines only:—

My duty towards my neighbour is to honour and obey the King and all my teachers and pastors . . . to do my duty in that stage of life, unto which God has been pleased to call me.

There was plenty more of that kind, and it was one of the worst stages of English social life. In fact, it was a time when men and women worked and lived like cattle. We suggest that the Bishop of Liverpool looks back and finds out what part the Church played in the bettering of life.

A very unusual thing occurred the other day at the Juvenile Court in Merthyr. A boy in answer to a question said that he had never heard the name of Jesus Christ. We have doubts about the truthfulness of the boy, but what startled us was that the Chairman should have accepted the story as true. The questioner appears to have taken what the boy said without properly

considering the matter. No child, boy or girl could go far without being acquainted with the name of Jesus. We should much like to know from the Juvenile Court Chairman how many people he knows who do not know the name of Jesus. We doubt whether he would find a single one.

It is really amazing the way in which religious doctrines are given to the world. Here is an example:—"Jesus was God and became Man, not God walking the earth in Human form." But if the sentence means anything it means this. Jesus was not God, but a man who previously had been God. When he became Man he lost his former consciousness as God, and now only himself exists as Man, and that leaves the story about Jesus as the finest piece of rubbish one could find.

But further information is given by the Rev R. F. V. Scott, and he tells us through the medium of the "Sunday Times" that the people around him could not decide what Jesus was and what he intended to do. Mr. Scott does speak in those simple terms because it would not suit a man who might be a God, or a God who might be a man. Some might hail him as a wonderful healer—a wonderful traveller, or even a teacher, a prophet, or anything else. In the long run Jesus seems to have declared that "he who hath seen me has seen the Father." That seems to settle the matter. And it would seem that for several thousands of years people are still quarrelling to find out what Jesus meant, what God meant him to mean, and what will be the use when the people of 1948 have come within sight of what all the meaning was intended. It was a wonderful exhibition.

The Bishop of Liverpool says that what the people need is to treat religion seriously. We are doubtful over that. Study will soon make it clear that the Parsons need more religionists, they live on them. . . . Give the clergy plenty of worshippers and they will be happy. . . . The fact is that right through Christian history the one thing that the clergy have asked is more people, and it seems the longer they cry, the smaller the number responding.

The Bishop says that to-day religionists are perplexed about religion. What the people are perplexed about is the everyday attempt to improve life on earth. Give the people that improvement and they will soon set all religion on one side. We are told that religion is not dead. Agreed, but it is very, very sick. We are told that Christianity has "held its own" for many, many years. Agreed, but the possibility of religion regaining its lost ground is not very impressive.

A Mr. Albert Goddard writes in the "Sheffield Telegraph" that he paid a visit to a church at Greenside and for the first time, to his surprise, saw a church quite full. He attributed the "miracle" to the "simple old hymns, and to a sermon being well delivered and straight from the shoulder, with no snobbery." He thinks that is an answer to empty churches. He may be right, but he has misunderstood the situation. What Mr. Goddard saw was the remnants of a *real* religion, and those who want that kind of church are very, very few. He is in at the death.

We may take an example from a recent religious "show" the conduct of Sir Stafford Cripps with regard to his religion. He is, of course, within his rights to have any kind of religion, and also to preach it whenever he pleases. That is his right as an Englishman. But Sir Stafford is more than a mere Englishman, he is a Cabinet Minister, and one of our most prominent men—not, he it noted, that he is a great man because of his religious beliefs. What he says about religion, in fact, is not very striking, and certainly does not carry with it anything that suggests a profound understanding of the history of religions.

So many attempts are being made to enter factories to tell the workmen about Jesus, that it is about time Freethinkers took a lead and said something about the part Freethought has played in raising their standard of living. There are plenty of Freethinkers in our workshops and we suggest that when the clergy or travelling preachers make their appearance they should take a hand in the matter.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No. : Holborn 2601.

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

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

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

Owing to an alteration in office hours, Lecture Notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, by first post. Friday morning for the following Sunday week's issue of the "Freethinker."

SUGAR PLUMS

The Annual Conference of the N.S.S. at Manchester had a good send-off with a reception of delegates and friends in the Grosvenor Hotel on Saturday evening. The Branch President, Mr. F. E. Monks, welcomed those present in a speech of warm fraternal greetings, and Mr. Chapman Cohen responded. An excellent musical programme, conversations, and refreshments, made an enjoyable evening pass all too quickly.

The conference room was well filled on Sunday when the Chairman, Mr. Chapman Cohen, opened the proceedings. Unfortunately, what looked suspiciously like an organised plan of opposition from a certain section resulted in a number of resolutions not being discussed, and so remitted to the Executive for consideration. Mr. Cohen was re-elected President of the N.S.S., as were the other officials, including the Executive. The day finished with an excellent public demonstration in the well-filled Chorlton Town Hall, with the re-elected President in the Chair, supported by Messrs. J. T. Brighton, J. Clayton, L. Ebury, T. M. Mosley, R. H. Rosetti, F. A. Ridley, and H. Day, whose speeches were received with great interest.

The Manchester Branch is to be congratulated on the efficient arrangements made and carried out for the conference. Nothing had been overlooked, and we take this opportunity of expressing our grateful appreciation to all those responsible.

Taking one thing after another we may say that a Christian God must have a fairly easy time. It is true that he may feel miserable when he notices how careless his followers are in doing what he wishes them to do. In fact, one begins to realise that the life of a god is not full of unadulterated happiness. There are disappointments, worshippers are careless and diminishing in number. And now, in this year of Grace, he has to listen to those who cry to heaven that in all parts of the world it is plain that the number of men and women who refuse to praise him is getting greater and greater.

We see from the "Catholic Herald" that for the past year a number of selected men have prayed to God to convert the people of Hertfordshire. The operation is now ended, but there is no indication that any number of adults or children have joined the Roman Catholic Church. We can imagine a very weary God saying to his angels, "It is of no use, no one has come to worship." We have seen all sorts of people, with all sorts of Gods, and we have also seen God after God shrink into nothingness, and a growing humanity take their place.

The Roman Catholic Church is very business-like. It seldom misses a chance. In proof of this, we note that even motorists are now under the protection of Saint Christopher. We suggest that motorists demand extra petrol in his name; but whether they will get it is another question.

Someone asks the "Catholic Herald" whether a Roman Catholic could vote as he chooses. The reply is, "Yes, if he chooses in accordance with his Catholic conscience." But the important thing is that "He cannot choose a bad candidate without committing sin." Now we know what Rome means by "political freedom."

BUDDHISM AND FREETHOUGHT

II

ALTHOUGH Gotama the Buddha never wrote a line himself, it is claimed that after his death, 500 of his disciples held a council and recited all that he had taught them; a second and third council followed, but nothing written seems to have come down to us earlier than from about 100 B.C. Whether these were written in Sanscrit or Pali is quite unknown.

It was perhaps the adoption of Buddhism (about 250 B.C.) by King Asoka—like the parallel case of Constantine and Christianity—which put Buddhism definitely on the map, and it is particularly interesting to learn that in spite of Buddha refusing to acknowledge any God, Asoka always called himself "the delight of the Gods," and his contemporary, the Buddhist King of Ceylon, did the same.

It is when we come to investigate the story of a "teaching" Buddha that the fun commences for, as far as I am concerned, most of this teaching seems to be as much the invention of later writers as are the "original" and "pure" teachings of Jesus. Rhys Davids' standard work, "Buddhism"—and he believed fully in the historicity of both the Buddha and a good deal of his teaching—made me almost as sceptical of the whole story as a study of the Gospels made me into a most determined non-believer in the historicity of Jesus.

John M. Robertson has something very pertinent to say on this score in his "Pagan Christs":—

"Firstly, the Buddha wrote nothing. Secondly, none of his disciples or contemporaries wrote of him. Thirdly, some of the documents that seem nearest in time to the alleged period of Gotama, such as the Dialogues, are thoroughly factitious, and strike the student as the reverse of trustworthy; while others are admittedly literary creations, ascribing to the Buddha extemporaneous verses of a highly finished quality. Fourthly, much of the teaching put in his mouth is of a nature known to be current before his period. As to the nature of his teaching the obscurity is equally great . . . they are so disparate, so discursive, so various in their tone, purpose, and point of view, that a very short critical study reveals difference of source, time and aim . . . much of the earliest literature exhibits all the marks of doctrinary myth—this by the implicit admission of the scholars who stand critically but confidently for the historicity of the teaching Buddha."

In fact, Robertson, after giving some striking examples, is constrained to add that "we have the cult *making its Teaching-God* on the ordinary lines, describing him as supernaturally born, calling him the 'Blessed One', and visibly creating for the traditional Teacher a flatly fictitious biography."

The word "Buddha" being a title and not a name, it is not surprising to learn that there were twenty-four Buddhas before Gotama who all taught, says Rhys Davids, "the same system." This teaching gradually died out after the death of each Buddha through the wickedness of man, and had to be taught all over again. Nor is it surprising to learn that there were sects of Buddhists—or at least one sect—who rejected Gotama and preferred the three previous Buddhas, particularly one called Kasyapa. There was even one Buddha called Gotama not "the" Buddha. How all this reminds one of that other true religion, Christianity!

Personally, I am put off Buddhism mostly by its teaching. One might well agree with some of the precepts which have such high sounding names as the "Four Noble Truths," the "Noble Eightfold Path," the "Ten Sins," and many others; but when I am told that "a wise man should avoid married life as if it were a burning pit of live coals," I consider such teaching to be an insult to humanity. And of what earthly use is it to anybody to be told that "one should sleep on a mat spread on the ground."

There can be no one "great" teacher who told mankind that it was wrong to lie, steal, or kill. As man became more and more civilised, certain rules of ethical conduct became a vital necessity. Murderers and thieves had to be restrained—and punished; and the idea that it was only when Moses or Jesus or Gotama taught that it was wrong to kill, that society agreed, and that before their appearance on earth, there was indiscriminate murder, with nobody to check crime, or that what we call crime, was never considered so until they began to teach, is so much unmitigated nonsense. Society had to protect itself at the dawn of civilisation much the same as it has to now, and a Great Teacher, whether he was a God or a Son of God or a Great Prophet or a Reincarnated Deity, is just plain unadulterated myth.

Moreover, I just loathe so-called "teaching" which tells me that I must "take a vow to abstain from dancing, singing, music, and stage plays." Or that I must abstain from receiving gold or silver; or from using scents or ornaments; or from taking intoxicating drinks; or that I must "go for refuge to the Buddha." I do not want to go to Buddha any more than to Jesus.

I think the culture of Western civilisation to be immeasurably superior to anything Buddha has to offer. I ridicule any prohibition which forbids me to enjoy music or art or literature. I think that to take a vow "not to eat at forbidden times" is idiotic. Who says which are "forbidden" times?

Says Rhys Davids, "Gautama considered a lonely life in the forest to be the most conducive to self-conquest," though it is admitted that Buddha in the end did not practise what he preached. In any case, I do not agree with Gotama. On the contrary, I deprecate to the utmost a lonely life anywhere; and I seriously ask any Buddhist, English or Hindu, what earthly good to anybody is the contemplation of one's navel in the lonely depths of a forest? I have some knowledge of the life of monks, Christian and Buddhist, and while no doubt one could come across some who practised all the virtues, most of them were lazy, ignorant and dirty. If everybody abstained from marriage and went to live in a forest, exactly what would happen to the world?

When I can get them, I love new clothes; for the genuine Buddhist, or at least for some of the "orders," one must be dressed in "cast-off rags"; even if a new robe can be procured it has first to be torn into little bits and sewn together again—which was the practice of Buddha himself. This kind of thing makes me tired; or to use modern phraseology, "I couldn't care less."

And why should I take a vow of poverty? I believe in wealth for the joy it can bring me, and I loathe poverty. In fact, I loathe all ascetic practices. But I am quite ready to admit that other people, who have a right to their opinions, violently disagree with me; and as far as I am concerned, can wear hair shirts, or lie on nail-studded doors, or indulge in Yogi meditation, to their heart's content.

I see nothing whatever in Buddhism to make me want to give Freethought up for it. I object to all religions. I do not consider that we ought to revere any man merely because he claims to be an Atheist, for giving up the God-idea these days is not a very great hardship. I gladly admit that as far as Buddha went, he appears to have been what we call a good chap, but I think the men who made wireless possible, who built our great transport services, who gave us great music, art, and literature, are a hundred times more worthy of our admiration than Buddha, Krishna, Jesus and Moses, put together. And I am not sure sometimes that our laughter makers, our comedians, the men and women who give us entertainment, who write books which make us laugh, or draw pictures which are funny, are not the most deserving of them all. Did Jesus or Buddha ever see the funny side of things, and roar with laughter?

H. CUTNER.

BELIEF IN HUMANITY

IN Mr. Wood's criticism of "Equality," in a recent issue, he thought he had struck upon a great revelation which, so far, was hidden from all the outstanding thinkers of scientific Socialism. It is, however, to be complained that nearly all the critics of Marxism are denouncing something they have never taken the pains to become familiar with.

Marx himself, in his "Critique of the Gotha Programme", exposed the error of "Equality" in a new society which has just come into existence out of the womb of capitalism and which, in every respect, bears the birth marks of the old society.

"Equal rights," he says, "we indeed have here; but it is still a 'bourgeois right' which, like every right, presupposes inequality. Every right is an application of the same measure to different people who, in fact, are not the same and are not equal to one another, that is why 'equal right' is really a violation of equality and an injustice." And he concludes that "with an equal output and hence equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another. . . . To avoid all these defects, right, instead of being equal, would have to be unequal." To which Lenin ("State and Revolution") adds: ". . . for if we are not to fall into Utopianism, we cannot imagine that, having overthrown capitalism, people will at once learn to work for society without any standard of right; indeed the abolition of capitalism does not immediately create the economic prerequisites for such a change."

Thus, as there is still no other standard than that of "bourgeois right," there is still need for a State, and this must be a national State, developed along its particular, historically defined lines, "which, while safeguarding the public ownership of the means of production, would safeguard the equality of labour and equality in the distribution of products." (Lenin.) Yet, this means still an interference into "private enterprise" and, hence, the lack of that absolute freedom Mr. Wood is dreaming of.

"Democracy" and "freedom" are the great catchwords of the hour, yet they are merely empty nutshells. What matters is their actual contents. Freedom for whom?; for what?; from what?; freedom is the negation of unfreedom, therefore freedom must be negated to the foes of freedom. Hence, there can be no freedom without respective restriction. "Freedom is the apprehension of necessity." (Hegel.)

Further, if there are foes of freedom and progress who must be denied freedom, there cannot exist one homogeneous humanity of equals, without discrimination and force. We have to face reality, to accept the things and people as they are and not as we want them to be. Mr. Wood argues in this way: "You must admit that spring is the loveliest season; so let us have spring all the year round." It is the way of religion to invent dreamlands with idealised conditions and to believe that persuasion will do for the conversion of men into angels. Despite all the jugglings of the sky-pilots there is no denying that Society is composed of different opposing classes—classes with very material interests—that never can be reconciled. This is exactly why religion postpones reconciliation on to the heavenly plane; in reality, one set of society has to give way to another. Whenever this happens, the members of the defeated class excel in vilifications.

Edmund Burke, who is regarded by the Universities in this country as one of the most profound political philosophers that the United Kingdom has ever produced, fought the French Revolution precisely because it was upsetting the "proper subordination of classes." He denounced Condorcet as a "fanatical atheist and furious democratic republican" and the bourgeoisie who came to power as "the swinish multitude." For him this bourgeois rule meant one of the "dirtiest, lowest, most fraudulent, most knavish of chicaners," they were "murderous atheists," "prostitute outcasts of mankind," "a desperate gang

of plunderers, murderers, tyrants and atheists." A similar reception is being offered to the Soviet regime up to the latest Czech Government.

In spite of all the slander served up in the capitalist press, progressive movements generally sinned by magnanimous leniency towards their opponents, thus calling forth counter-revolution. Joseph McCabe, writing on "The Revolution of 1948," states that "the disillusioned democrats everywhere became rebels, bandits, guerillas. They had made no reprisals in their triumph. The royalist victors soaked the soil of Europe with their blood. Their leaders were scattered from Constantinople to New York, so we, their grandchildren, have again to breast the hill and raise the old flag." ("The Monthly Record," March, 1948.)

Preaching alone will never change conditions. The Gospel of the World Government of Humanity is nothing but a trick to cheat and distract the wronged masses from their own course of gaining proper liberation.

PERCY G. ROY.

RITUAL MURDER

THE above heading may suffice. "Crime and Culture" and "The Leopard's Spots," could perhaps supplement it, and still leave it inadequate.

We are into the year A.D. 1948, and are getting shocks that warn us that man's burden has scarcely diminished since the year one.

We were reminded the flowers blush unseen, and waste their sweetness. We should also know that Evil gloats in obscurity.

Perhaps war has inured us to horror, and on a scale too large to be hidden; except by its own grossness. A devil still lurks within the human heart—where "The Kingdom of Heaven" is: although we have achieved the United Nations Organisation, and also much enlightenment.

The same innate devil is still the actuating principle (and principal) arrayed against Science and Truth, Art and Beauty, Genius and Nobility; and all the lesser good things that offer themselves, and that make for peace and happy civil existence that few seem to know and enjoy to the full—because of inherent and inherited "cussedness."

Less than a year ago there appeared simply and shocking an article in a Glasgow Socialist paper, headed "Ritual Murder." A great African chief, who was feted at the Guildhall, London, after World War I, died in 1943. His assistant chief was expected to succeed him, but disappeared. He had been doped, hit on the head, and tied to a chair. A knife was then thrust upward between his chin and Adam's apple, and his blood caught in a bowl. . . . He was "sacrificed" to deities for the repose of the soul of the dead chief, whose three sons were implicated in the murder.

Eight men were sentenced to death, but so strong was the intervention from England that six times the execution was suspended. The three sons were given life imprisonment, and four, I believe, were finally executed.

Now in this morning's paper we read that "Leopard murders" have taxed the resources of the police. Human flesh is used to propitiate deities. Numerous executions, it is said, have reduced these murders to about three a month.

The hope and fate of mankind to-day depends upon the just, subtle and effective organisation of the nations united for human welfare.—EVELYN MACDONALD (Lower Hutt). "The Standard," January 2, Wellington, New Zealand.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 3s.; postage 2½d. Ninth edition.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

WHAT MAKES A CURATE FUNNY?

LET us examine the evidence. The curate was not amused when he missed the last bus; but, on that dreary walk home he thought of his joke. Then his advertisement appeared in the local paper: "Lost.—9-30 p.m. bus from Stonebridge to Hucelecote." Of course, everyone reads the advertisements in a local paper, and the curate's joke flew round the town. A certain young lady was so impressed she went so far as to marry the curate on the strength of his sense of humour.

Dazzled, the curate started to record all his missed buses and trains. But it was twenty years before his wife made her contribution to the game; and I'm afraid people thought it was a joke in very bad taste, especially the jury.

Strange, isn't it? For the curate's joke was really the point on which the case for the prosecution . . . hung. All at once people decided it was really rather a poor little joke—a curate's joke. The same people who had made violent protests if ever the curate attempted to vary his formula, suddenly decided that his wife must have found it increasingly tedious to live with one joke. The same people who had been as proud of the curate's advertisements as of any personal habit, in a flash revised their opinion and found the joke provided a motive to add to the evidence of some curious circumstances attending the curate's death. Yes, I'm afraid the jury said the curate's wife was guilty. Her advertisement was: "Lost.—A husband." The rest of the evidence was purely circumstantial.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

OBITUARY

BASIL STANLEY DIXON.

Mr. Dixon was a member of Headquarters, and an enthusiastic supporter of the Merseyside Branch over a period of many years, during which his devotion to Freethought never slackened. He had a personality of unusual charm, and his numerous friends mourn the loss of a stimulating and delightful companion. His married life was, unfortunately, brief, but particularly happy. The widow has suffered a grievous loss. His wish for a secular service was duly respected and on Saturday, the 8th May, 1948, before an assembly of male relatives and friends a service was conducted at Anfield Cemetery by Mr. Walter Parry, Vice-Chairman, Merseyside Branch, N.S.S. A. M. P.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Empire Migration." Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.; Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Bradford Branch (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.; Mr. H. DAY.

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

LONELY? Join Friendship Circle; details, 6d. Secretary, 34, Honeywell Road, S.W. 11.

THE EARLY LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE

VI

PRIOR to 1880, when the old school and schoolmaster's and usher's house were pulled down and rebuilt, the latter was a long, low structure flush with the path on the left side of London-road going southwards. In the grounds of this house stood the ancient yew, still a prominent object at the junction of Bury and London roads. From the plate in Martin's "History of Thetford" (1779) it will be seen that the old school building had one chimney-stack near the north gable, four dormer windows in the roof at the east side, and three windows high up in the walls, with an entrance porch. This porch was a curious structure with an open iron door, in a very low doorway, and in the angle above it two worked stones, one having the motto "Loyalte me oblige" (*Loyauté me oblige*—the Norman-French motto of Sir Richard Fulmerston who founded the school) and above it two griffins with their tails interwoven. This porch was approached by a gateway with triangular pediment, immediately adjoining to the south the house now occupied by Dr. A. G. Minns. Beyond, the school grounds were bounded by a low wall within which was a row of trees. The interior of the school, as shown by a water-colour painted in August 1873 and preserved in the Norwich Free Library, had the canonical master's desk at the south end, above it being a four-light Jacobean window. The centre of the school was bare, and down each side were old-fashioned desks, backed by wood panelling, above which were rows of pegs. The floor was of stone paving.

In Paine's schooldays, when the number of scholars was probably but few, there appears only to have been a master—the Rev. William Knowles—and no usher, for in 1738 the Rev. Thomas Eversdon, who had been usher, was promoted to the head mastership, acting as usher as well. Paine says ("Rights of Man," Part II.): "My parents were not able to give me a shilling beyond what they gave me in education, and to do this they distressed themselves." In the "Age of Reason," he adds:—

"My father being of the Quaker profession it was my good fortune to have an exceedingly good moral education and a tolerable stock of useful learning. Though I went to the Grammar School I did not learn Latin, not only because I had no inclination to learn languages, but because of the objection the Quakers have against the books in which the language is taught. But this did not prevent me from being acquainted with the subjects of all the Latin books used in the school. The natural bent of my mind was to science. I had some turn, and I believe some talent for poetry; but this I rather repressed than encouraged as leading too much into the field of imagination."

In the same book he said: "As to learning that any person gains from school education, it seems only like a small capital, to put him in the way of beginning learning for himself afterwards." "It is only in the living languages," he further states, "that the new knowledge is to be found, and certain it is that in general a youth will learn more of a living language in one year than of a dead language in seven; and it is but seldom that the teacher knows much of it himself." Here there is probably some echo of his days at Thetford.

Oldys says:—

"The expense of young Paine's education was defrayed in some measure by his father, but chiefly by the relations of his mother. He was deemed a sharp boy of unsettled application, but he left no performances which denote juvenile vigor, or uncommon attainments. His tuition was directed by his expectations to what is useful, more than to what is ornamental; to reading, writing, and cyphering, which are so commodious to tradesmen rather than to classical knowledge, which is decorous in gentlemen."

Cheetham summarises the matter by stating that "his education was merely and scantily English." A more friendly biographer in the "Deists' Magazine" for 1820 says that he "gave very early indication of talents and strong abilities, and addicted himself, when a mere boy, to reading poetical authors; but this disposition his parents endeavoured to discourage."

When eight years of age, he composed the following epitaph on a crow which he buried in the garden:—

"Here lies the body of John Crow
Who once was high, but now is low;
Ye brother Crows take warning all,
For as you rise, so must you fall."

At an even earlier age he composed some lines on a fly being caught in a spider's web, and when editor of the "Pennsylvania Magazine" wrote some very passable poetry.

As previously stated, Paine's father was a stay-maker in business for himself, and at the age of 13 Thomas was removed from school "to be taught the art and mystery of making stays."

"The business of a stay-maker," says Oldys, "he never liked, or, indeed, any occupation which required attentive diligence and steady effort. He, however, worked on with his father, fitting stays for the ladies of Thetford during six years, except for a short while that he labored with a cousin in making bodices for the girls of Shipham, in the county of Norfolk. Dr. Conway says that he was nearly five years with his father at Dr. Stanley Hall has pointed out that Paine had the itch for adventure, which comes to most boys at adolescence. In the "Rights of Man" (Part II.) Paine says:—

"At an early period, little more than 16 years of age, raw and adventurous, and heated with the false heroism of a master (Rev. William Knowles, master of the grammar school of Thetford, in Norfolk) who had served in a man of war, I began the career of my own fortune, and entered on board the Terrible privateer, Captain Death. From this adventure I was happily prevented by the affection and moral remonstrances of a good father, who, from his own habits of life, being of the Quaker profession, must begin to look on me as lost. But the impression, much as it affected me at the time, began to wear away, and I entered afterwards in the King of Prussia's privateer, Captain Mendon, and went with her to sea."

The first adventure appears to have been in 1753, and the second in 1756. W. G. CLARKE.

A clever theft was praiseworthy among the Spartans, and is equally so among Christians, provided that it be on a sufficiently large scale.—HERBERT SPENCER.

PROPAGANDA LEAFLETS

(Suitable for free distribution at Meetings).

Is. per 100, post free.

Christian Ethics	...	4 pp.
Does Man Desire God?	...	4 pp.
Are Christians Inferior to Freethinkers?	...	4 pp.
The Beliefs of Unbelievers	...	4 pp.
What is Secularism?	...	2 pp.
Sunday Cinemas	...	4 pp.
Because the Bible Tells Me So	...	2 pp.

From the General Secretary, N.S.S., 41, Grays Inn Road, W.C. 1.