

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### America at the Cross-Roads

IN the week that sees these lines appear, July 21, 1951, occurs the 52nd anniversary of the man who achieved a "double-first" as both one of the greatest of Americans and as one of the most redoubtable protagonists of Freethought in modern times: we refer, of course, to Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-99) who, to employ the Shakespearian rhetoric of which he himself was so consummate a master, "shuffled off this mortal coil" upon July 21, 1899. To indulge in fresh paeans of praise of Robert Ingersoll in the pages of *The Freethinker* would, assuredly, be a case of "painting the lily." Ingersoll's name and fame have long been established as among the most famous in the annals of Freethought. Along with his great predecessor, Thomas Paine, and his great contemporary, Charles Bradlaugh, he has long since been enrolled amongst the Immortals in the army of human liberation. To praise him further here would be superfluous: it would, in fact, merely be to "expatiate upon the obvious."

Elsewhere in this issue we reprint a masterly appraisal of Ingersoll's own philosophical approach by one of his own countrymen, himself a leading exponent of American Rationalism, Robert Scott. Ingersoll's standing as a philosophical thinker and the precise character of his critique of Theism, can there be found set forth in a masterly manner.

Here, it is not our present intention to write a eulogy of Ingersoll: in our submission, as we have already indicated, such praise would be quite superfluous at the present time of day. What we propose to do here is rather to, as it were, "point the moral and adorn the tale," as they relate to the life-work and to the intellectual legacy bequeathed to his native land by the greatest of American Freethinkers.

Assuredly, the world can have witnessed few stranger spectacles than the "United States of America" as they are, to-day, a century and three-quarters after the English-born Thomas Paine first gave to his adopted country the name by which history now calls it. For we are apt, in considering the now generally conservative role which the United States plays in the contemporary world, to forget what an iconoclastic breach with tradition, what a profoundly revolutionary anomaly the original establishment of the North American Republic represented. A democratic republic before the French Revolution—which, incidentally, the American Revolution did so much to stimulate—and a secular state long before the Russian Revolution, the original American Republic came before a world just beginning to emerge from centuries of servile prostration before throne and altar, as the very quintessence of revolutionary change. The Founding Fathers of the Republic, Jefferson, Franklin, Paine, Washington himself, were extreme radicals in politics, whose "Declaration of Independence" reproduced, almost unaltered, the inspired slogans of the great contemporary

prophet of Revolutionary France, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Whilst in the still more conservative sphere of religion, the self-same Founding Fathers, most of them Deists or advanced Freethinkers, wrote into the Constitution of their newly founded State clauses designed to make the new Republic the first secular state in modern history. In which last connection repeated judgments of American Courts have affirmed in the teeth of religious bigotry that the United States of America is still a State in which, in the words of its great Liberator, George Washington himself: "The Government of the United States is not in any sense founded upon the Christian Religion" (Treaty with Tripoli, 1797).

Whilst contemporary radicals were proclaiming in Europe as a distant ideal the secularist slogan of a "Free Church in a Free State," the United States had already attained this goal which, in this country, is still in 1951 one of the unfulfilled objectives embodied in the present constitution of the "National Secular Society."

Such is America in name and in its still effective jurisprudence, a secular non-Christian state; a distinction which it actually shares with its present ideological rival in world-politics, the U.S.S.R.! However, as and when we turn from law to fact, the actual spectacle that the current American scene presents is startlingly different. For what present-day America offers is a religious "melting-pot," as it has been aptly termed, without parallel in the contemporary world. For the still officially secularist land of Jefferson and Paine has become, simultaneously, a by-word for Protestant "Fundamentalism" of the crudest anti-evolutionist and bible-banging type immortalised and symbolised in the notorious "Monkeyville" Trial (1925), the scene of a sinister Catholic plot to resurrect the world-dominion of the Vatican rejuvenated by American Catholicism and by American money in the spiritual and secular spheres, with Rome herself dominated by a future American monopoly of the Papacy: and, finally, the twentieth century anti-type of the Palestine of the first century, where an entire crop of new religions all "made in America" have erupted upon the modern world; at least two of which new-fangled creeds, Mormonism and "Christian Science," both creeds of incredible crudity, have, nevertheless, succeeded in crossing the Atlantic and in becoming international religions. Obviously, modern America has travelled a long way since the now distant days of the "Declaration of Independence"!

America, to-day, stands at the Cross-Roads of History: which way will she turn? Upon her eventual decision will much depend. For, in view of the present world-ascendancy of the United States in politics and in economics, her actions in the religious sphere, also, are bound to be felt far beyond the Atlantic. There are sinister possibilities in the current situation. Will the America that may eventually emerge from the current "melting-pot" be a paradise for "Fundamentalists" of the Revivalist Billy Sunday, Moody and Sankey type? Or will the Catholic Church succeed in its present strenuous attempt to undo the secular constitution of the



United States and "to call in the New World to redress the Balance of the Old," with New York as the successor of Rome and an American Pope as the successor of St. Peter? Or, perhaps, even more sinister than either of these distressing alternatives, will a new "Christianity" emerge from our twentieth century "Palestine" to dominate a new "Dark Age" in the name of some more lucky "Joseph Smith," "Mrs. Eddy," or "Father Divine"?

These prospects, sinister and incalculable, undeniably exist. Fortunately, there are other, more cheerful prospects also in view: the victory of the Freethinking ideals for which Ingersoll fought all his life: the ultimate emergence of a genuinely democratic, genuinely scientific rationalist civilisation in "The Century of the Common Man."

For America, this is the actual alternative that confronts her. "Ingersoll, thou shouldst be living at this hour"!

F. A. RIDLEY.

### BISMARCK'S CONFLICT WITH THE PAPACY

BETWEEN 1830 and 1840 the Prussian State strove to exert its authority over the ecclesiastical powers of the Catholic Church in its Rhenish Provinces. The Vatican's Proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in 1854, the Syllabus in 1864, and the Roman Decrees of Papal Infallibility in 1870 made the later struggle, termed the Kulturkampf, by Prof. Virchow, inevitable. With the Jesuit camarilla in France, under Napoleon III overthrown, and the temporal authority of the Papacy curtailed by the unification of Italy in 1870, Bismarck, earnestly supported by German Progressives, determined to make Prussia's civic power supreme.

Not only were Papal pretensions in Catholic Germany a menace to secular authority, but Prussia's Polish possessions were also adverse to civic control. For Poland was, as it still virtually is, one of the most priest-ridden countries in Europe. With the creation of the German Empire in 1871, the Catholics numbered one-third of the population and then, with 60 votes in the Reichstag, pledged to oppose all the more enlightened measures of the Government, the Clerical Centre, according to Bismarck, constituted "the most monstrous phenomenon in politics." With the assistance of the Liberals and Radicals, he tried to crush the Catholic reactionaries. In 1872, Falk became Minister of Education and later, the May Laws were passed. As Grant Robertson records in his standard biography of Bismarck: "The Jesuits were expelled; civil marriage was made compulsory; the Catholic Bureau in the Ministry of Education was suppressed; the inspection of schools was withdrawn from the Roman priesthood and placed under the control of State inspectors; priests were forbidden to abuse ecclesiastical punishments, e.g., excommunications; all ecclesiastical seminaries were placed under State control; every priest before being permitted to exercise office in the Church was required to be educated in a German university and to pass an examination in German history, philosophy and literature; all exercise of the spiritual office by unauthorised persons incurred loss of civic rights, and the State was empowered to withhold from recalcitrant bishops the payment of State endowment."

A cardinal, an archbishop, and other disobedient clerics were fined, imprisoned or dismissed, and more than 1,300 parishes had no recognised priests, while the Romanist laity were instigated to rebel against this penal legislation.

Then, a Catholic fanatic tried to murder Bismarck. Also, the bitterness shown by the clericals and their devotees demonstrated the immense power of the Black International. Then Bismarck lost the support of the Conservatives whose assistance was indispensable if he were to secure the autocratic system he was determined to establish.

Subsequently, Bismarck publicly denied that he authorised the Kulturkampf, although in his earlier private correspondence he had bitterly reviled his Conservative allies for their desertion. Moreover, he cordially approved Falk's policy in 1878, both in the Reichstag and the Prussian Landtag, but later repudiated the Kulturkampf and unceremoniously dismissed Falk. As Grant Robertson observes: "A scapegoat had to be found, and Falk, the hero of the National Liberals and Radicals, served the convenient purpose of exculpating the Chancellor and affronting the parties with which Bismarck broke between 1878 and 1879."

Until his conflict with the Vatican, Bismarck's autocratic methods had proved successful. But when he confronted the Church, he miscalculated the traditional prestige, resourcefulness and devious diplomacy of his antagonist. The conflict served to strengthen the Ultramontanes, and Liberal Catholicism faded away. The cry of Holy Church in persecution rallied previously passive Catholics in her defence. By 1878, the clericals had organised a remarkably powerful party provided with an influential press, ample funds, and effective means of inter-communication. Even in Bismarck's lifetime they became, as Robertson avers: "the best drilled, most obedient and strongest single party in Germany."

Before the May Laws were repealed, they were greatly relaxed, as Bismarck needed the votes of the Centre Party against the Social Democrats in the Reichstag. Moreover, at this period, the old Pope died, and was succeeded by the more pliable Leo XIII. Both parties were weary of the conflict, but neither desired to confess defeat. Although Romanists still boast that Bismarck was driven to Canossa, the matter ended in a compromise. Although in 1887, Leo XIII assured the Consistory that the Church had secured everything material for which she had striven, yet, as Robertson testifies: "Bismarck received the Order of Christ, the first Protestant to be given this Papal decoration, a portrait of Leo XIII and a copy of the Pope's Latin poems. He did not in return forward a bound volume of his speeches in which he had laid it down that he would not go to Canossa either in body or spirit."

Bismarck's armistice was anathema to the advanced parties, and it heralded a period of reaction and obscurantism. Now that the disputants had come to terms, Clerical and Conservative support enabled Bismarck to carry measures that the Progressives opposed. In any case, the struggle with the Clericals, and its sequel, is a serious warning to all who disregard the danger of the machinations of the Black International.

T. F. PALMER.

The (Catholic) Church originally thought that the new Copernican theories upon the movement of the earth were contrary to Catholic dogma, and she formally condemned as heretics, the astronomers who upheld them. To-day, however, she declares that when the Holy Scriptures spoke of the immovable world in the centre of the universe they were merely accommodating themselves to the scientific ignorance of the primitive races of antiquity, and she now fully accepts the heliocentric system as expounded by Galileo and Descartes. Thus she is compelled now to consider her former dogma as merely a useful fiction, and it is secular science which has taught the Church how to understand the Bible.—JAURES.



## INGERSOLL'S LETTERS

## II

INGERSOLL attacked the legend of "Christ" (he appeared to make no distinction between the two words "Jesus" and "Christ"), as thoroughly as any other Biblical legend, throughout his lectures and essays; but one can see how, slowly but surely, he changed in his estimation of its value. In *What Must We Do To Be Saved?* (an early lecture) occurs quite a famous passage which I have often had hurled at me. It is:—

"And let me say here, once for all, that for the man Christ I have infinite respect. Let me say, once for all, that the place where man has died for man is holy ground. And let me say, once for all, that to that great and serene man I gladly pay the tribute of my admiration and my tears. He was a reformer in his day. He was an infidel in his time. He was regarded as a blasphemer, and his life was destroyed by hypocrites, who have, in all ages, done what they could to trample freedom and manhood out of the human mind. Had I lived at that time, I would have been his friend, and should he come again he will not find a better friend than I will be."

This was written quite early in Ingersoll's anti-Christian career, and proves how strong had been his religious training. It took many years of hard writing and thinking to change his ideas about "Christ." In *About the Holy Bible*, he can hardly conceal his contempt for "the man Christ" and his philosophy. He asks:—

"Was he kinder, more forgiving, more self-sacrificing, than Buddha? Was he wiser, did he meet death with more perfect calmness, than Socrates? . . . Was he a greater philosopher, a deeper thinker, than Epicurus? In what respect was he the superior of Zoroaster? . . . Was he grander in death, a sublimer martyr than Bruno? Was he in intelligence, in the force and beauty of expression . . . in knowledge of the human brain and heart . . . the equal of Shakespeare, the greatest of the human race?"

And as for the "philosophy" of Christ, dealing with "Resist not evil" he asks, "Is there any philosophy, any wisdom, in this? Christ takes from goodness, from virtue, from the truth, the right of self-defence. Vice becomes the master of the world, and the good become the victims of the infamous. No man has the right to protect himself, his property, his wife and children. Government becomes impossible and the world is at the mercy of criminals. Is there any absurdity beyond this?" And one of his conclusions about the wonderful teachings of Christ is, "Only the insane could give or follow his advice."

The insane! Ingersoll had travelled far from the picture he painted of "the man Christ" for whom he had "infinite respect." And he travelled still further in one of his letters written in 1892 to a Mr. F. McCarthy, in which he protested that he had been misquoted. The letter ended with, "My own opinion is, that that faith business, and the atonement idea, and the regeneration dogma, were all produced long after Christ was dead. As a matter of fact, I do not believe that such a man ever existed." It will be seen that Ingersoll had to travel the hard way to come to the only logical conclusion about "Christ." But it was not easy in such a hotbed of Presbyterianism as the U.S.A. was in his day to say outright that Jesus was a myth like all other Gods. That Ingersoll was obliged to come to such a conclusion shows how his lawyer-mind had to bow to the evidence—or lack of evidence.

And here is a gem of a letter which is just as valuable to-day as it was when Ingersoll wrote it in 1892:—

"Mrs. Sarah H. Greenleaf,

My dear Madam:—This morning I received your curious letter, in which occurs the following:—

'Tell me your object in attacking what you call Christianity. There is an immeasurable gulf between the Christianity you attack and the Christianity we, who love its founder, believe in.'

From this, it seems that I have not attacked real Christianity. Then it follows, as a matter of course, that I have attacked a false Christianity. Why do those who believe in the true Christianity find fault with me for attacking a false Christianity?

It seems to me that I should receive your thanks for endeavouring to destroy that which you admit to be false.

In the light of your question, and of your statement, you will easily see that the rest of your letter is a *non sequitur*, and that you have fallen into the error of finding fault with me for attacking what you admit is false.

Yours respectfully,

R. G. INGERSOLL."

Most Freethinkers are to this day told that what they attack is not "true" Christianity, not the beautiful and wonderful religion of Jesus, but "Churchianity," or false Christian sect, or anything whatever so long as it is not called the teaching of Jesus. I have heard even Rationalists, as reverently as any Christian, refer to this much in the same way as Ingersoll himself did in his early days. The difference between them is that Ingersoll progressed sufficiently to throw overboard the fetish of a real Jesus as well as the nonsense that he went about "doing good," a statement so beloved by our historicists.

It is interesting to note that Ingersoll had a very high appreciation of Holyoake whom he constantly praised; but even Holyoake's most ardent admirers must have received a shock when they read the bitter, contemptible, and hostile pamphlet, entitled the *Warfare of Opinion*, he wrote against Bradlaugh in 1898. A copy was sent to the Colonel, and his response is printed in this volume of his letters. Poor Ingersoll—he, like many of Holyoake's friends, must have been staggered; in any case, he said as little as he could about the *Warfare of Opinion*, and nothing whatever against Bradlaugh; and he must have found it a most unpleasant task to let Holyoake off as lightly as he did.

These letters are a joy to read. They are as interesting, in their way, as the incomparable *Lectures and Essays*. In many of them, he opened his heart freely on all sorts of subjects and no doubt his forthright views must have caused even Freethinkers often to differ from him. He was a champion of Birth Control, and of Anti-Vivisection. He had many Socialist admirers, but was himself against Socialism and Communism. He looked upon Charles Dickens as the greatest of English speaking novelists and thought Ouida's *Ariadne* a very great novel. For Shakespeare he had the most unbounded admiration, and dismissed Bacon with a snort of contempt. He insisted that "Bacon was entirely unable to write Shakespeare," for "he had no capacity of that kind." And he was convinced "that Shakespeare could have had no religion." He also thought—as I have always done—that Byron "was one of the greatest poets the world has produced." But one could go on quoting the great man enough to fill hundreds of pages of this journal. Ingersoll is surely one of the most quotable of all Freethought writers.

The *Letters of Ingersoll* is a work which will delight almost every Freethinker but, alas, its price—£2 2s.—must make it nearly impossible for most of us to buy. I can only hope for it, in spite of that, a great and increasing circulation.

H. CUTNER.

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### ACID DROPS

Writing in the *R.C. Tablet*, Mr. Arnold Lunn deplored the intellectual vagaries of Dr. C. E. M. Joad who alternately "pricked secularist nonsense brilliantly" on the Brains Trust (B.B.C.) and then went on to "write a dreadful article in praise of suicide." It certainly does appear odd that Joad, after committing intellectual suicide, should be so squeamish about a merely corporal act of *felo de se*. But outside the *Tablet* and its kind, does anyone seriously take any notice nowadays of Dr. Joad's mental acrobatics?

The Rev. Frank Martin asks in *The Sunday Graphic*, "What does it matter whether we preach from a pulpit or from a soap box?" Agreed, but better still, why not follow the example of Jesus and go up a mountain?

The Rev. E. E. Robinson, Vicar of Ellacombe, Devon, is a sadly disillusioned man. Upon his return to St. Pancras and Islington, where he had once worked as a curate, he was horrified to find that, not only had the churches been pulled down but that the local council was putting up flats in their place. "London," declared Mr. Robinson, "is becoming pagan." Not at all, Revd. sir, merely sensible! Human beings have bodies which need warmth and shelter, whereas God who has neither "body, parts or passions," presumably does not feel the lack of either—so surely he can wait for a house, like everyone else?

It appears that there is now an Institute of Christian Education, and that its research committee is going systematically to study the effect that the New Education Act is having in inculcating Christianity in our schools. A Norfolk report shows that out of 570 schools applied to for information, 190 ignored the request—which is rather strange. Roman Catholics appear to devote from one and a-half to four hours a week to religious education, other schools only about forty minutes. And certainly not much harm can be done in so short a period as forty minutes!

Withdrawal from religious education appears to be confined to Roman Catholics and Jews, but is rarely exercised—only eight cases out of 165 pupils. Of course, all modern helps are utilised, such as films, film strips, and broadcasting. If all this is true, why are so many religious people whining about child delinquency being caused by lack of religious training? There never has been more religion jammed down the poor kiddies' throats than these days, and child delinquency is increasing all over the country. If religion can stop it, why does it not do so?

That Australia is overrun by Catholicism is very well known and, naturally, Archbishop Masterson, of Birmingham, who has just returned from a visit, is more than overjoyed. What Rome wants, he says, is a Catholic school in every parish and Catholics are clamouring for State aid. One thing the Archbishop noticed is that Catholic schools are better equipped than State schools. We wonder whether this is true? If it is, it is not surprising that he was "deeply impressed" with the strength of Roman Catholicism in Australia.

Although all, all are one in Christ, quite a number of earnest Christians never cease their opposition to women usurping any privileges men enjoy in the Church. One disgruntled male, writing to the *English Churchman*, calls attention to the "distressing illustration of modern irreligion," in "the ungracious precocity of women." He angrily points out that sex equality does not come from

"applied biblical knowledge," but rather from "atheistic communism." The "headship" of man over woman is clearly indicated in the Bible, and females should know their place in the scheme of things. What a sweet example of loving Christianity is this pious and unctuous gentleman!

A recent speech on the Rowntree book, *English Life and Leisure*, by the Archbishop of York, will not be hailed as "optimistic" by even the most besotted believer in the Christian faith. Poor Dr. Garbett is obviously bewildered at the way in which people will simply not believe in the Glorious Message of Jesus Christ; and the extremely poor showing the clergy have with "agnostics"—how our archbishops hate the word "Atheism"—appalls him. He puts these as the principal reasons for the decline in church attendance, and he suggests that the Church must be ready to meet our "spiritual hunger" with the Gospel of Christ stated in language "which the twentieth century can understand." This is "spiritual" bankruptcy with a vengeance!

Where is there any evidence of "spiritual hunger"? Who cares, except parsons, two hoots about what the Gospel Jesus is supposed to have said in Palestine 2,000 years ago—most of which is admittedly so obscure that Dr. Garbett has actually to plead for its restatement so that it can be understood! Where are the parsons who are ready to meet "infidels" in debate? Has Dr. Garbett the pluck to meet one, for example, of the eminence of Bertrand Russell—not in some small parish hall but in a broadcast debate so that the world can listen to the way in which a high-placed Churchman can meet an "infidel's" anti-Christianity? Yet the Archbishop is sure that the Church will go forward with good courage. How? With God's help!!

Our very religious contemporary, the *Christian World* is publishing many angry letters in reply to a contributor who ventured to doubt the existence of the Devil. They triumphantly produce numbers of Biblical texts, and they are horrified that anybody can doubt such infallible proofs of the Evil One. We are in absolute agreement. All Christians should believe in the Devil on the authority of Holy Writ, and if they don't we shudder to think of their future terrible fate. Fancy sizzling in boiling oil for eternity! No, the Devil is as real as God Almighty Himself, and every Christian knows it in his heart, and lives in fear and trembling—as indeed he should.

Amongst recent immigrants to the State of Israel were a colony of Arabian Jews from the still mediaeval Kingdom of the Yemen. They arrived in Israel in the midst of a snowstorm. As snow is unknown in Arabia, they thought that the Lord was welcoming them back to the Holy Land with a special supply of heavenly manna. So they devoutly opened their mouths and swallowed the snowflakes as they came down. Evidently, they thought that the Lord was releasing some of his "frozen assets" for their special benefit.

According to recent figures there are more than 28 million Catholics in the U.S.A. There are 43,889 priests for this huge flock, which claims to be expanding at the rate of a million a year. Five million Catholic children obediently learn by heart the Catholic Catechism in 11,767 educational institutions run by the Church. When will a new Thomas Paine write a new "Common Sense" to stop the present drift to "Rome Rule" in the very land which he did so much to liberate?



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## SUGAR PLUMS

The new syllabus of monthly lectures to be held under the auspices of the Birmingham Branch of the N.S.S. for the remainder of 1951 is now to hand. The meetings will be held, as usual, at the Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street (off New Street) at 7 p.m. on the last Sunday of each month. The first lecture of the new series will be held on July 29. The speaker is Mr. Charles H. Smith, honorary secretary of the Branch, and the subject, "Man, an animal run to Brain?" should have a wide appeal. It is hoped that local Freethinkers will rally to make this opening meeting a success.

## ROBERT G. INGERSOLL—ATHEIST

ATHEISM is defined by several standard dictionaries as disbelief in, or denial of, the existence of a God or supreme intelligent Being. Hence atheism is a positive point of view. It is a mental rejection of the concept or idea that there is a God, a rejection that may or may not include outright denial!

Agnosticism, in its specially identifying meaning, is suspension of judgment or incertitude as to the existence of a God or supreme intelligent Being. Hence agnosticism is an indecisive point of view. It is neither acceptance nor rejection. It is unbelief as distinguished from belief and disbelief. The agnostic also says, "I do not know," but so do the atheist and the theist; for disbelief and even denial, and also belief, as to the reality of a God are entirely consistent with incomplete knowledge so long as there is, or is thought to be, valid evidence to support the belief, the disbelief, or the denial.

In brief, the atheist has decided that there is no God; whereas the agnostic has not made up his mind whether there is or is not a deity.

In the light of these definitions and of certain public statements of his later years, Robert G. Ingersoll was an atheist. It is true that Ingersoll habitually called himself an agnostic. In so doing he followed the example of his illustrious contemporary, Thomas Henry Huxley, the celebrated English biologist who coined the word for the purpose of escaping the social disabilities which the clergy attached to avowed atheism. Apparently it was partly for the same reason that Ingersoll applied to himself the word *agnostic*, though he several times said,

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mistakenly, that atheism and agnosticism are identical. Ingersoll, however, did not have the incertitude, he did not experience the indecision, which is the characteristic feature of agnosticism, nor did Huxley. Ingersoll, to be sure, only three years before he died, titled one of his lectures *Why I Am an Agnostic*; but in that lecture, and in several other speeches of his later years, notably his last public address, he made it perfectly clear by his assertion of disbelief, and in some cases of outright denial, that he was an atheist.

In his lecture *The Gods*, written in 1876, he said:—

"Man continues to believe that there is some power independent of and superior to nature . . . and his best energies have been wasted in the service of *this phantom*" (my italics).

"[Modern clergymen], unable to produce miracles, insist that the absence of miracles—the steady, unbroken march of events—proves the existence of a power superior to nature. The fact is, however, that the indissoluble chain of cause and effect *proves exactly the contrary*" (my italics).

In his last public address, *What is Religion?*, Ingersoll said:—

"Matter and force [energy] cannot exist apart—no matter without force, no force without matter . . . And matter and force are indestructible. That which cannot be destroyed could not have been created . . . If matter and force are from and to eternity, *it follows as of necessity that no God exists*" (my italics).

"Failure seems to be the trademark of nature. Why? Nature has no design, no intelligence. Nature produces without purpose, sustains without intention, and destroys without thought."

"Beyond the universe there is nothing, and within the universe the supernatural does not and cannot exist."

"We now believe that the universe is natural, and *we deny the existence of the supernatural*" (my italics).

In his last Press interview, as printed in the magazine *Mind*, New York, March, 1899, Ingersoll said. "The supernatural must be given up. It must be admitted that nature has no master; that there never has been any interference from without. . . ."

Finally, in a letter written on July 13, 1899, just eight days before his heart was stilled by death, he wrote: "I still believe that all religions are based on falsehood and mistakes. *I still deny the existence of the supernatural*" (my italics. See the Kittredge biography of Ingersoll, Dresden edition, page 215).

Only an atheist could have made these several quoted assertions. The agnostic has unbelief; but only the atheist disbelieves, and only the atheist denies.

We may therefore rightly frame the following syllogism:—

A God would be supernatural.



Ingersoll disbelieved in and he denied the existence of the supernatural.

Therefore Ingersoll was an atheist.

At his brother's funeral the grief-stricken Ingersoll said that "in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing." But there is no room for honest doubt that Ingersoll, though he said to the last he "hoped" for everlasting life for himself and his loved ones, had only a wish, not a hope, of an after-life. The word "hope" is defined by *Webster's New International Dictionary* as desire accompanied by expectation of obtaining what is desired, or the belief that it is obtainable. Ingersoll undoubtedly desired a future life, but certainly he neither expected it nor believed it obtainable. He knew that only God could make postmortem survival possible, and Ingersoll, as we have seen, disbelieved in and even denied the existence of the supernatural, and therefore a God. Ingersoll habitually adorned his public speeches with poetic rhetoric, so much so in fact as to run the risk at times of being misinterpreted or misunderstood. The "hope" and the "listening love" of which he spoke so eloquently were not his own. They were merely those of bereaved persons who, unlike himself, did not disbelieve.

Too long have American and British atheists and less advanced rationalists, as well as clergymen, called Ingersoll an agnostic. To speak or to write of that great and good man as an agnostic despite his publicly avowed denial of the existence of the supernatural is not only illogical, but it does his memory an injustice and the noble cause of atheism a disservice. Because of the odium with which the clergy have smeared the word atheist, even British and American atheists who have read the later speeches of Ingersoll have, in the majority of cases, applied to him and to themselves the comparatively "respectable" term agnostic. But this procedure gives aid and comfort to the clergy and their numerous supporters. This practice, which is nothing less than moral cowardice, should be discontinued, and the sooner the better; for it is an appeasement which, particularly at the present time, is a serious obstacle to cultural and intellectual progress. It is to be regretted that Ingersoll, who grasped and held aloft for years, with a courage unsurpassed and a success never equalled, the torch whose light dispels the darkness of religious ignorance and superstition, did not openly wear the badge of atheism; but all the signs indicate that he would have done so had he lived a few years longer.

In a letter to the Rev. Henry M. Field on November 11, 1887, Ingersoll referred to himself as "an atheist."

ROBERT H. SCOTT.

San Francisco.

(Reprinted from the *New York Atheist*.)

### FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS

**Some Notes on the Biography of Robert Green Ingersoll**  
ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL was born in Dresden, New York, August 11, 1833. His father was a Congregational minister, who removed to Wisconsin in 1843 and to Illinois in 1845. Robert G. Ingersoll was admitted to the Bar in 1854, and successfully practised law in Illinois. During the Civil War (1861-5) he organised a cavalry regiment, of which he was colonel—the prefix "colonel" stuck to him for life—until he was captured at Lexington, Tennessee, December 18, 1862, by the Confederate cavalry under General N. B. Forest. He was paroled, waited in vain to be exchanged, and in June, 1863, resigned from the armed services.

Subsequent to the conclusion of the Civil War, Ingersoll was active in law and in politics. He was attorney-

general of Illinois in 1867-9, and in 1876 his speech in the National Convention of the Republican Party, naming James G. Blaine for the Presidency, won him a national reputation: his designation of Blaine as a "plumed knight" almost won the day for his candidate.

Throughout the generation between the end of the Civil War and the end of the century, Ingersoll was a leading member of the Republican Party. As an orator, he ranked among the best of his day and has even been placed, along with Abraham Lincoln and Daniel Webster, as in the very topmost flight of great American orators. As a Republican politician, he was as much opposed to the economic radicalism of W. J. Bryan as he was opposed to Bryan's "Fundamentalism" in the sphere of religion. Ingersoll would have certainly held high political office and might, quite possibly, have been run as its candidate for the Presidency by the Republican Party, had it not been for the bitter opposition aroused in a still predominantly Protestant and "Fundamentalist" America by his anti-religious opinions.

Robert G. Ingersoll was a most eminent criminal lawyer, ranking in this last respect with his successor in the annals of American Freethought, Clarence Darrow. As legal counsel for the defendants in the notorious "Star Route" trials he performed what an American historian has described as "one of the outstanding legal feats of the second half of the nineteenth century by securing their acquittal in 1883."

However, despite his eminence as both a politician and as a lawyer, Colonel Ingersoll was most widely known on account of his attacks upon religion. An American authority describes his anti-religious activities in these terms:

"For thirty years, using the lecture platform largely as his medium and talking before great assemblages, he expounded with great force and eloquence a simple agnostic creed the chief articles of which were a protest against the doctrine of eternal punishment, a denial of the certainty of the existence of God, and a rejection of the inspired character of the Old Testament. These orations were singularly successful and succeeded in shaking the faith of thousands." Our authority adds that "Robert G. Ingersoll was certainly the most formidable advocate of anti-Christian principles that the New World has ever known. In religious circles 'Bob' Ingersoll aroused a hatred never previously equalled since 'Tom' Paine." Ingersoll's lectures were published in many volumes during his lifetime and a twelve-volume edition appeared in New York in 1900, the year after his death.

Robert G. Ingersoll died at Dobbs Ferry, New York, upon July 21, 1899, in his 66th year. His pre-eminence amongst the Freethinkers of the New World is still uncontested. Elsewhere in this issue of *The Freethinker* articles will be found defining his philosophical position and his literary achievements.

F. A. R.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### ACID DROPS—A CRITICISM

SIR,—I must confess disappointment that the change in the editorial chair did not rid us of that horrid anachronism in our weekly journal. I refer to "acid drops and sugar plums." What a dreadful hangover from Ally Sloper, from Tired Tim and Weary Willie, and the general "Comic Cuts" atmosphere of nineteenth-century boyhood. Aren't we ever to grow up?

To speak seriously—for it has its serious side—this "little kiddies'" nomenclature and irony, applied with a heavy instrument, rob your paper of dignity and the claim to be recognised as a serious contribution to modern thought.



To take but one example of many, that in your issue of July 8 regarding the Rev. Braithwaite's remarks, your heavy sarcasm about people being damned and the inquisition is not amusing but childish, and avoids the real point at issue. For the utterance was a proper subject for *serious* comment in *The Freethinker*; the comment, namely, that Mr. Braithwaite typified a growing section of organised religion which seeks to realise reactionary, totalitarian methods in control of public conscience. The whole significance of this vicious attack on freedom was neglected by your treatment of the incident as an "acid drop."

I do beg of you, sir, to drop this lollipop baby language and treat such matters with dignity and pertinence, under some such title as "Current Topics." And I would suggest that a little more humour and less "funniness" would be more in consonance with the high purpose of *The Freethinker*.—Yours, etc.,

P. C. KING.

[Do readers agree?—EDITOR.]

#### POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS

SIR,—In his enumeration of some popular superstitions which appeared in *The Freethinker* of June 24, Mr. A. R. Williams includes that of standing a poker against a grate to make the fire draw. But this is no superstition. Standing a poker against a grate, and thus dividing the draught, *does* help to make the fire draw. The effect may not be very noticeable with such a thin object as a poker, but there is an effect which, however slight, takes the belief out of the region of superstition.

I do not know what the practice is now, but I do know that, long before the railways were amalgamated, practically every engine driver on the old London and North Western Railway used to carry a strange-looking object to and from his work. This was known as a "jemmy," made of iron, with a stem about an inch wide which ended in a hook. Before starting his journey he would place the stem of the "jemmy" across the blast pipe in the smoke-box of the engine and clamp it securely into position by hanging a couple of wagon links to the hook. The object of this operation was to make the engine "steam" by dividing the blast, and "steam" it certainly did. Not all "jemmies" were equally successful. Engines, like individuals, varied, and several types of "jemmy" might have to be tried before one was found to suit the temperament of a particular engine. These "jemmies" were used with the utmost secrecy, as the Company did not approve of them, considering them to be detrimental to the engine.

Standing a poker against a grate may not be as effective as placing a "jemmy" across the blast pipe of a locomotive, but the same principle applies to both.—Yours, etc.,

PETER PIPER.

#### WITCHCRAFT

SIR,—My thanks are due to Mr. Bear for his quotations from Russell and Trevlyan, who *fully* bear out what I wrote. Of course, some "educated" people in 1700 did not believe in witchcraft any more than they do now; but people like Lodge, Crookes, Conan Doyle, and a number of our modern professors certainly did and do. And I agree, as Trevlyan points out, that in 1736, "popular superstition (on witchcraft) was almost as gross as ever," and "simple folk" (who numbered the bulk of our population) were angry that they were no longer allowed to see witches burnt to death. If, as Mr. Bear contends, nobody except "a conservative-minded minority" believed in witchcraft, why was any Witchcraft Act at all necessary? Surely there was no need for the Government to protect people by an Act from something that did not exist?—Yours, etc.

H. CUTNER.

#### BERNARD SHAW AND SIR HENRY WOOD

SIR,—As a supplement to my friend Corrick's interesting contribution, I may mention that it has just been revealed that Shaw was a member of the Rationalist Press Association at the time of his death. At times there seemed a studied ambiguity about his attitude to religion, and it is pleasing to know that he was prepared to join what some would call the freethought sect.

A comparison can be made with another Rationalist, Sir Henry Wood, details of whom I give in the revised edition of my *Encyclopædia of London*. His ashes were interred in the Church of St. Sepulchre, Newgate, where there is a stained glass window, showing him playing the organ in that church and conducting a Queen's Hall concert. The inscription was composed by another Rationalist, Lord Horder. Notwithstanding a crucifix must needs be represented in stained glass, and in 1946 Mr. Arthur Collins, Chairman of Odhams, was constrained to say he had often expressed a wish that St. Cecilia's Day should be celebrated with *prayer* and *music*.

Freethinkers must always be buried—even if it be under a mass of lies.—Yours, etc.,

WM. KENT.

#### RELIGION BY ORDER

SIR,—Most intelligent newspaper readers have noticed, from time to time, how the conspicuous personalities in our armed forces, field-m Marshals and air-m Marshals particularly, invariably are, or take great pains to appear to be, ardent churchmen, whereas the mass of their personnel are notoriously the reverse.

During the early, i.e., the disastrous parts of our last three wars, this much-publicised piety has noticeably been our leaders' sole qualification for their position!

One obvious explanation is, of course, that these men all belong to a now moribund generation, a generation taught to believe what AUTHORITY orders them to believe rather than use their brains.

The other dominating reason is probably not so widely realised by the public. This is the fact that no *unbeliever* (who permitted his lack of belief to be known) would have the slightest chance of promotion.

A commander, no matter how popular and competent, who failed to attend prayers and church, or to support the ship's priest with his unpopular hocus pocus, would quickly find himself on the beach, if not actually out of the Service.

The Services always have been, and still are, hotbeds of religious humbug and hypocrisy, but it is only by the periodic outbursts in the Press against compulsory religious services (officially camouflaged as "voluntary") that the public gets any hint of the underground, undemocratic coercion and velvet-gloved intimidation that goes on ceaselessly and ruthlessly, in God's name.—Yours, etc.,

W. C. BROTHERTON,  
Lt.-Commander R.N. (Rtd.).

#### DULCE DECORUM

When you come into Church take your hat off,  
Though there's no need completely to peel;  
Get down on your marrow-bones meekly—  
Don't bend there half-sitting, but kneel.  
The Lord looks with love on the lowly,  
(With smiles extra sweet on Sunday);  
It's grovelling brings in the gravy—  
So bend yourselves down to pray.  
And give Him His titles of honour—  
As Lord God of this and of that;  
And when the bag comes round, don't miss it—  
And keep a sharp eye on your hat!  
Stand up when they hoot from the hymnal;  
Sit down with the crowd for a rest;  
Don't smoke, spit, or chew or keep coughing—  
And the Lord will know you've done your best.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

#### LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

##### OUTDOOR

- Blackburn (Market).—Sunday, July 22, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.  
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.  
J. CLAYTON'S Lecture Engagements: Burnley Market, Sunday, July 22, 7 p.m.; Haslingden, Tuesday, July 24, 7-30 p.m.; Padiham, Thursday, July 26, 7-30 p.m.  
Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. BARKER.  
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK.  
Also Lectures at Platt Fields, Sunday, 3 p.m.; Alexandra Park Gates, Wednesday, 8 p.m.; St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site, Sunday, 8 p.m.  
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: J. M. ALEXANDER and W. G. FRASER. Sunday Evening, 7-30 p.m. (Highbury Corner): L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER. Friday Evening, July 27, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park): J. M. ALEXANDER and F. A. RIDLEY.  
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, July 21, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.  
Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A. SAMMS.  
South London and Lewisham Branch (Brockwell Park).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY  
West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: C. E. WOOD.

##### INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday July 22, 11 a.m., S. K. RATCLIFFE: "English Life and Leisure."



### CLERICAL IMPERTINENCE

THE Bishop of Barking, the Right Rev. H. R. Gough, at a Dagenham Festival of Britain Service, told his congregation what a miserable wretched crowd the British workers are. He said the Englishman's motto seems to be to do as little work as possible for as much money as he could get. If he did not get what he wanted he would strike regardless of other people's suffering.

"In the old days" said the Bishop, "the characteristics of the British people were honesty, hard work, truthfulness and purity. They were not so to-day, the Englishman's word was no longer his bond, the Bible was no longer read by most people, and churches were half empty."

Now let us examine this sermon. In the good old days the British people were honest, so the Bishop tells us. If so it was through fear. Men were hung for sheep-stealing, youths were transported for stealing a loaf of bread and who but a lunatic would want to go back to the days portrayed by Dickens. The Bishop said that in these good old days, the British worker was noted for his hard work—what did he get out of this hard work? The average life-span of workers 140 years ago was 30 years of age; often the few who lived longer were so enfeebled by this hard work that their end was the workhouse. What did their hard work achieve? Nothing for themselves, but swollen profits for their Christian employers. Such was the wonderful Industrial Age that helped to make Britain great. The Bishop said that truthfulness and purity were characteristic of those good old days, when women worked in the mines, stripped to the waist and frequently pulling trucks like beasts of burden; when children died by the thousand from malnutrition; when dirt and slums spread plagues and where the gin palaces supplied, for a few pence, the dope which helped to make these wretched people forget their wretched lot, even for a few hours. It was the Bench of Bishops which, in the House of Lords, voted practically unanimously against the Bill to abolish the use of children in the mines; when wretched sailors were sent to their doom in coffin ships so that the owners of these ships could draw the insurance moneys and add to their already ill-gotten gains; when over 90 per cent. of the population were illiterate and compulsory education was unknown. We are told that coal is the life blood of the nation. In the month of May, this year, nearly 100 miners lost their lives in a pit disaster in Durham. Take the risk of a miner's life, add to it the daily risks faced by thousands and thousands of workers in all classes of industry, and compare these lives with that of a bishop. The only accident the bishop is likely to have is to slip on the steps coming down from the pulpit where he has been preaching a lot of outworn unscientific rubbish for which he receives from £100 to £200 per week. The follower of the lowly Nazarene lives in his Bishop's Palace of many rooms. Even to-day thousands of workers consider themselves fortunate if they have a couple of rooms without modern conveniences. Many workers strike because it is the only means by which they can procure food for themselves and their children. Evidence of this was furnished in Spain last month. Bishops don't need to strike for higher wages or adequate food for their families. The revenues of the Church of England alone, of which the Bishop is such a bright and shining light, run to many millions of pounds per year, and yet we are always hearing that so many of the clergy are badly paid. Of course, this is quite true in many cases; but what do the Church Commissioners do with this money on, which they don't pay Income Tax?

Another cleric, Dr. Leslie Weatherhead of the City Temple, London, who is in Australia on a visit, told the workers there in a broadcast: "You are just like us at home. Your whole attitude to work is rotten. Men used to be proud of doing a day's work properly and doing it as well as they knew how. Now it is 'How can I get more money for doing less work?' 'How can I squeeze more spare time without doing more work?'" But Weatherhead is a man with a very good job and is doing congenial work under the most pleasant conditions. The clerics do not deplore the fact that more and still more money is needed for armaments. It is only when the worker asks for more money that, in their opinion, he becomes almost a criminal.

We can do without our bishops and our Weatherheads, but we cannot do without the workers. Neither of these reverend gentlemen would classify himself as a worker, and in that respect, at least, they are right.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

### THEATRE

APART from the usual run of London plays, there have recently been two productions of special interest. They are Ibsen's "Ghosts" and "Breach of Marriage" by Dan Sutherland.

"Ghosts" is a soul-destroying play whose lesson cannot be too hardly learned. It is a case of the sins of the fathers being visited on the children. It is also a case of Ibsen's play living long after him, for the Lord Chamberlain dared not licence it to the Edwardians. But its place in the pattern of our everyday life could not be denied with the outbreak of the 1914 war, when it was licensed for performance on the grounds of its educational value to young people in the forces and as an exposition of the ravages of V.D. It is a finely written play with the characters excellently and deeply drawn.

Beatrix Lehmann gave a fine and moving performance as Mrs. Alving, who had struggled to hide her husband's debauchery and retain respectability. Frederick Valk as the narrow-minded Pastor Manders is not sufficiently subtle in the part. The son, Oswald, who returns from Paris with the disease attacking his brain, is acted with great understanding by Douglas Montgomery. The maid, Regina, is suitably played by Siobhan McKenna. On learning that she and Oswald have the same father, she cannot forgive Mrs. Alving for bringing her up as a servant instead of a lady. Finally, there is John Ruddock as Jacob Engstrand, the widower of Regina's mother, and who married her believing that the father of the unborn child was a touring Englishman, or—as he says—it might have been an American or a Russian. The play was produced in Vienna two years ago when this sentence caused loud guffaws at every performance. But the play is grim, and there is no intentional humour.

Robert Mitchell's production is not masterly enough to carry it beyond a short run at the Embassy Theatre.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

### TWO VIEWS

Here is the official religious forecast. In many parts of the world, as in China, the great tide of missionary expansion was being turned back.—The REV. LESLIE E. COOKE, Secretary, Congregational Union of England and Wales.

If you were to ask me if I see any grounds for believing that a revival of religion is near at hand, I should answer very hesitatingly. He was sure, however, that the tide was turning, and that there was an increasing revolt against irreligion.—The BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL.