

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Politics and Secularism

THE appearance of these lines in print will coincide with the result of the forthcoming General Election. At a time when politics are, so to speak, "in the air" and when political interest is at its height, we regard the conjunction as an opportune one for discussing what we may term the fundamental relationship between secularism, both as a social philosophy and as a practical way of life, on the one hand, and politics and political philosophy in general on the other.

It is, in the first place, surely obvious that secularism is, in part, political, that it has inevitably a political aspect. This conclusion follows necessarily from the essential nature and aims of secularism as such. The ultimate aim of secularism to which, we assume, the great majority of freethinkers of all shades would subscribe, is a secular state, a secular society freed from the "dead hand" of religion, of the churches, and of their secular allies and defenders. Such an ultimate goal requires, inevitably, political action at some stage, or stages, of the proceedings. In point of fact, 80 per cent. of the "aims and objects" of the National Secular Society are unattainable without recourse to political action for their effectual attainment, and the same is true in an even greater measure of rationalist societies, like our Spanish and Indian friends, who are forced to wage their current struggle for existence and expansion against totalitarian regimes in which religion and the social order are inextricably interwoven.

The secularist purists who claim that secularism should wash its hands of politics altogether are, in effect, confusing two entirely distinct things: *party* politics with *political* action. It would, of course, be suicidal for secularism to attach itself unreservedly to *any* single political party and to toe obsequiously "the party line." Freethought is, by definition, the antithesis of conditioned thought, none the less, the transformation of the State is an indispensable pre-condition for the effective realisation of a secular society: and such a preliminary transformation is inconceivable without *some* form of political action. We may relevantly add that, if this is so in even democratic and protestant societies like ours, it is the case to a far greater extent in lands subject to totalitarian regimes and to totalitarian religious cults.

If we turn from the logic of secularism to its actual historical evolution we find that, throughout its formative era, the theological criticism of religion went hand in hand with political criticism of the existing social order which conceded to religion its socially dominant position. It was, thus, in no way an accident that the author of *The Age of Reason*, still the most devastating critique of Biblical religion ever penned, was also the author of *The Rights of Man*, the classic textbook of English radicalism for the next half-century. In point of fact, all the outstanding protagonists of early British secularism, Thomas Paine, Robert Owen, Charles Bradlaugh, George Jacob Holyoake, had political interests and activities equally with their

anti-religious ones; most of the active secularists of the 19th century associated the political doctrines loosely denominated as "radical" with their secularist activities, just as so many secularists to-day tend, particularly upon the European Continent, towards the political parties of the Left.

Indeed, upon the Continent, where Freethought faces, not the easy-going Church of England, but the ruthless repression of militant Catholicism, all the advanced movements in European history, from the Freemasons to the Bolsheviks, were forced, willy-nilly, to take up an aggressively anti-religious attitude. (It may, perhaps, be news to some, at least, of our readers that the famous slogans of the French Revolution—"Liberty, Equality and Fraternity"—were expressly attributed to the French Freemasons half a century before the outbreak of the great French Revolution.)

In recent years this robust association of anti-religious criticism and advanced radical criticism of the current social order which, at one time, was almost endemic to the secularist movement, has tended to decline, and a one-sided view of secularism appears to regard it as confined purely and simply to anti-theological criticism. This is the more surprising in the mid-20th century when our enemies, the churches, are all working overtime as political "pressure-groups," and when, in particular, the Roman Catholics, now once again the leading opponents of secularism on a world-wide scale, are moving every political lever in the universe in order to restore their medieval ascendancy over society. If one were to concede the proposition that it is possible to fight the Roman Catholic Church purely with the weapon of intellectual criticism, this would actually be equivalent to admitting that the papacy is a purely religious organisation and not, as her whole history proves, the most powerful, persistent and ruthless political organisation in recorded history.

We are living, to-day, unquestionably, at one of the major decisive turning-points in the long evolution of human history. We are actually witnessing to-day the maturity and, we may hope, the ultimate triumph of a vast social and intellectual movement which originated at the epoch of the Reformation, which became politically conscious at the time of the French Revolution, and the final end of which no man can foretell with exactitude. It is an ever-expanding movement of human society and of the human intellect against all forms of privilege, superstition and irrational traditional authority, whether in the spiritual or in the secular sphere; and, if we may judge by present indications, its final goal would appear to be the "century and civilisation of the common man," an equalitarian democracy.

This vast and ever-accelerating movement of the human spirit has already great achievements to its credit. It has broken, we may hope for ever, the former immemorial grip of priestcraft upon mankind. It has done away with "the divine right of kings to govern wrong," and is in

process of similarly abolishing the regimes of the plutocrats and demagogues who took over from the kings and priests. It has created modern science and modern democracy.

So vast and far-reaching a revolution in human affairs, one accompanied by inevitable excesses and mistakes, inevitably encounters fierce opposition. Equally inevitably, this opposition assumes political forms. The final goal of a secular society can, however, only be realised by pursuing and enlarging the goal of advancing democracy which implies that secularist politics consist in supporting everything which tends towards the ultimate goal of a secular society and in opposing everything which hinders its attainment, a conception of politics which, we repeat, will be found frequently to cut right across party alignments.

The Victorian Age was marked, pre-eminently, by social stability; our own, conversely, by extreme social disorder. It already seems certain that our age must eventually face a general breakdown, ending, presumably, in a new Dark Age, or else transform itself into a higher and more universal social order than our planet has so far known. The final issue of this alternative is not, by any means, a matter of indifference to secularists. Far from being such, the progressive solution of our current social crisis represents the essential and decisive condition for the survival, expansion and ultimate victory of secularism and of the secular spirit.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### SOVIET RUSSIA IN 1950

IN 1950, the official announcements of the authorities and the declarations of the Soviet Press expressed almost complete satisfaction with the economic and political achievements of that year. Still, the anticipation that the Five Year Plan had been exceeded was lacking, but the public was informed that the basic requirements of the Plan had been accomplished. It was also asserted that Russia's Asiatic successes counterbalanced any set-backs in the West and that her undeviating desire for peace far exceeded that of the Capitalist States.

The purity of Russian electoral proceedings was solemnly proclaimed at the selection of the Supreme Soviet when Western elections were derided as orgies of bribery and corruption. In any case, the Supreme Soviet assembled in June when the budget was ratified and the Government appointed by a show of hands. Then a resolution was passed in favour of the Stockholm Peace Appeal. It is recorded in that splendidly instructive *National Register* (Longmans, 1951), that: "Not the least important of the decrees ratified was that introduced on January 12 to reintroduce the death penalty for the crimes of treason, espionage and sabotage. This measure, for which no official explanation was advanced, was represented as a response by the Government to petitions from various sections of the public. Although the reintroduction of the death penalty was a logical climax to the vigilance campaign which flared up in the course of 1949, the traditional Soviet usage of the term sabotage might occasionally be invoked against the embezzlers and speculators who, as the Press amply testified, still flourished to the detriment of Soviet industry and agriculture."

Prices were reduced in March from 10 to 30 per cent. for many foods and other consumer commodities and trade is said to have very considerably improved. Industrial production was increasing, although its expansion proved less than had been predicted. The

grain and cotton crops proved eminently satisfactory, while the number of livestock exceeded that of the pre-war period. Yet timber production and the yields of the fisheries were disappointing if the grain crops showed an increase of 300 million poods above the yields of the preceding year.

Hydro-electric and irrigation plans were projected on a grandiose scale. The greatest canal on our globe was to be constructed to ensure irrigation on a gigantic scale, chiefly for the cultivation of cotton, grain, and the development of agricultural operations generally. Collective farms below 300 hectares—the hectare is equivalent to 2½ English acres—were to be converted into larger units in which machinery could be more effectively utilised. These changes were almost immediately carried out. It was announced in November, we gather, "that in the Ukraine 20,320 collective farms had so far merged as to form 7,812 new units and that the average size of the Ukrainian farms had risen since January from 855 to 1,288 hectares." Administrative control over the machine and tractor centres could thus become tightened, while the creation of rural cities would enable the peasantry dwelling in outlying districts to congregate on the larger farms.

A decade after the inclusion of the Baltic States in the U.S.S.R., Moscow claimed that "in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania respectively 95, 80, and 75 per cent. of peasant homesteads had been collectivised. Figures published in September showed that collectivisation was complete to the extent of 97.4 per cent. and 94 per cent. in the Western Ukraine and Moldavia respectively." Still, in Estonia especially, there was decided opposition, and this, perhaps, explains the restoration of capital punishment for "Kulak saboteurs." Some were, indeed, suspected of attempts to return to capitalism. High Estonian functionaries were dismissed and replaced by officials more amenable to Soviet control.

Education in Russia has apparently made marked advances and there has been an official parade of academic freedom, but ultimately all accepted teaching seems to need Governmental consent. All departure from academic orthodoxy, save in one instance when Stalin repudiated a quaint theory of the origin of human language, is frowned upon.

In foreign affairs one of the main events of the year was the conclusion of a series of agreements with the so-called Peoples Republic of China. Under the terms of this Sino-Soviet Treaty, "each country agreed to assist the other in the event of an attack by Japan or any country allied to her." Other instances of Russia's goodwill towards the Chinese Republic coincided with intensified animosity towards the United States, which still prevails.

In 1950, Soviet Russia resumed commercial relations with Persia and guaranteed sugar supplies and the provision of steel rails and other transport requirements as well as cotton, cement, timber and other commodities. Then came the Korean conflict, which the Soviet spokesmen attributed to the aggressive activities of Koreans of the south, instigated by European and American machinations. Everything Western was denounced as malign and malicious. The Russians consistently proclaimed their belief in international co-operation. Yet, every effort was in operation to develop and sustain internal industry and commerce.

The Soviet's proceedings in Eastern Germany and Austria differ enormously from the objectives of the Western Powers, and there appears little prospect at present of any amicable settlement. One can only hope

that the relations of East and West will greatly improve and that no appeal to armed force will be made. For peace and prosperity are still the professed ideals of Soviet Russia and the "warmongers" are declared to reside in the Capitalist West. Indeed, the Communists of all countries urged that the preservation of peace is dependent on the maintenance and extension of the Soviet system with the acceptance of its ideology in the Western World.

T. F. PALMER.

### DOUBTING CASTLE

WHEN Beverley Nichols penned the article on Unbelief which appeared in the *Sunday Chronicle* of October 7, he did the Freethought Movement a greater service than he knew. He has done it a service in bringing its existence to the notice of a much larger audience than we can command and by the mention of the many eminent names that are associated with it. Moreover, he has made it plain that an "atheist" is not the lone, ostracised figure of popular fiction, but a member of a movement which is sufficiently extensive to be divided into many separate organisations. That there are separate organisations, a fact out of which Beverley Nichols seeks to make capital, is no more remarkable than that religion should be split into different sects.

When Beverley Nichols states that Christian's grimdest encounter was set in Doubting Castle, he conveniently forgot to mention that his hero, on setting out on the famous journey to save his precious soul, had deserted his wife and children. Perhaps, to Beverley Nichols, this is a mere trifle. But, to the sincere searcher after Truth, it illustrates, in no uncertain way, the main distinction between those who believe in two worlds and those who believe only in one, especially as concerns their behaviour in the world through which both are now passing. If there are two worlds, one temporary, and one eternal, then it is obvious that everything concerning the former should be subordinate to the latter.

In his own "Pilgrim's Progress," Beverley Nichols comes across a Doubting Castle in modern Britain but he has no such grim struggle there as his predecessor. Admitted, some of its occupants are giants in their way, but none of them is quite clever enough to catch the wily Beverley Nichols. The first giant he encounters is Charles Bradlaugh, "a great man, none the less—lion-hearted and almost agonisingly sincere." But no modern artillery is required to demolish *him*. If there is no God, asks Beverley Nichols, why did Bradlaugh waste fifty years of his life in talking about Him? The answer to this supposed poser is that he did not. What Bradlaugh talked about was "the belief in God" which is not quite the same thing. "If," says Beverley Nichols, "Bradlaugh was right, the whole history of European civilisation, the glories of the pictures of the Renaissance, the piety of countless builders who lifted the towers of our cathedrals—all was the work of so many madmen." Perhaps he has never heard of the Dark Ages, when Christianity reigned supreme, and he seems to be quite unaware of the fact that the Renaissance—the Re-Birth—was coincident with the loosening of the Church's fetters. Nor is architecture confined to any particular creed. While second to none in my admiration of the great cathedrals, I fail to see what a God, or even a belief in a God, has to do with their erection. We need only consider the architecture of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Arabs to make this clear.

In his fanatical zeal for the Christian faith Beverley Nichols is prepared to stoop to any mean controversial

device, and even to use reputations as stepping-stones to attain his ends. This is particularly noticeable in his treatment of Marjorie Bowen. Anyone having the least acquaintance with the publications of the Rationalist Press knows that they deal with a variety of opinions, mostly controversial, and that no one could reasonably be expected to subscribe to them all. Beverley Nichols, however, thinks otherwise. Of all people he picks on Miss Marjorie Bowen. He rightly describes her as a most lovable artist, with a featherweight pen. In her examination of human relationships, and in particular, married life, she is as sensitive as the lady in the story of the Princess and the Pea. "Well," says he, "*Miss Bowen, as an honorary associate of the Rationalist Press, must be presumed to approve its publications, such as 'The Thinker's Forum.'*" He then goes on: "Let us pick one of these at random. It is called 'A Young Man's Morals.'" Notice the "at random." If that particular book was picked "at random" then God must have been at his side. Why this particular book? Because it contains the following:—

"How in the name of reason can an act of sex between two people be called filthy at one time and, when these two have appended their signatures to a paper, become praiseworthy and clean? The act is either depraved or clean; it cannot be both."

I have already dealt with this argument in *The Freethinker* and have given my reasons for not subscribing to it. But, according to Beverley Nichols, I ought. After the insult to Miss Bowen has served its purpose, Beverley Nichols, ignoring the fact that he has already stated that Miss Bowen must be presumed to approve the publication, calmly states that anyone who is acquainted with the published work or private character of Miss Bowen must realise that such arguments would be repugnant to her. Could Christian hypocrisy go further?

Beverley Nichols next pays a visit to Conway Hall and listens to a "sermon" "delivered in a weary voice by the veteran atheist, Joseph McCabe." As he left, he states he heard the audience singing in quavering voices:—

"Tell me not in mournful numbers  
'Life is but an empty dream,'  
For the soul is dead that slumbers  
And things are not what they seem."

Apart from the obviously illiterate rendering of the above, Joseph McCabe, in a letter to the *Sunday Chronicle*, states that the poem quoted was not sung at all, and no hymn was sung after the discourse. Our pilgrim is now practically at his journey's end. He pays a visit to the Headquarters of the National Secular Society where he informs its President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, that he has never found a Rationalist answer to the Design Argument. From the exhibition he has already given it is doubtful whether he would understand it if he did.

As a finale to his diatribe of misrepresentation and vilification Beverley Nichols goes out to contemplate the stars. "They hang there eternally, in an intricate lace of silver. . . . They spring and sparkle over us, in a miraculous ceiling of diamonds. It seems to me a little odd that so fairy and fabulous a piece of architecture should have been erected by an Arch-lunatic." This may go down with the readers of the *Sunday Chronicle*, but it certainly affects in no way those who do not believe in a God at all.

FRANK KENYON.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH. By Colonel Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

## ACID DROPS

Our contemporary, *The Greenock Telegraph* (Monday, October 8, 1951) poses a problem which will, we imagine, cause severe headaches in the camp of the theological army. We quote verbatim: "a man, after an accident, was presumed dead for a period of up to 15 minutes, as he showed no sign of life. The surgeons who examined him decided to try and restore life. They cut through his chest, massaged his heart, and gave injections. The man after some time, revived, and presumably still lives."

I have always believed that at death the soul leaves the body. Presumably that this man received the call from his Creator, am I to assume that mortal man has the power to revoke His decree or is this poor mortal living without a soul? Can religious teachings explain this? "A question hard to answer," as the old Latin grammar phrased it. The word now lies with "Christian Evidence."

**Bishop Heenan** (R.C.) of Leeds, has presumed to give some political advice to the British Electors. Catholics in the Labour Party are warned to steer clear of and, presumably not to vote for the "left-wing rebels" in the Labour Party who follow the lead of Mr. Aneurin Bevan. "In their hearts," declares his lordship, "they are Marxists" who support Marshal Tito's heretical brand of Marxism which is also in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church and which Bishop Heenan goes on to denounce as "totalitarian." Certainly, a Church which interferes in political elections would also seem to deserve this name. As nearly all the divisional Labour Parties are followers of Mr. Bevan, are we to draw the conclusion that Catholics are now forbidden to vote for the Labour Party? What does the devout R.C. Labour Minister, Mr. R. Stokes, think about this?

The name of **Giordano Bruno**, Copernican astronomer and Freethinking philosopher, who was burnt at Rome A.D. 1600 by the Inquisition, is known to all Rationalists and is honoured the world over—except apparently in his own native land, Italy. In Montecosaro, in Italy, the Fascists suppressed the street name—Via Giordano Bruno. In 1949, this decision was reversed and the name restored. The present municipal government, having a strong clerical bias, has again erased the name of the great heretic from the street.

The Reverend **Leslie Wetherhead**, of City Temple fame, has been to Lourdes in order to investigate its self-styled "cures." It is a well-known fact that members of rival religious bodies are apt to be very sceptical about each other's doings. Accordingly, we are not surprised to find the rev. gentleman's conclusions about Lourdes are in general agreement with those of every critical investigator since Zola. Ninety-eight patients out of every hundred come back in the same condition as they originally went. Mr. Wetherhead adds: "There is probably no stream in Britain which could not boast as high a proportion of cures . . . if the patients came in the same numbers and in the same psychological state of expectant excitement."

A momentous question—"Are Parsons Really Necessary?" was recently asked by the Rev. R. M. Thompson in the *Nottingham Journal*, and the reason for this question was the genuine poverty of many of our clergy. This is no doubt true, and it is certainly a disgrace that the various Churches, at their wits end for recruits,

should expect their servants to work for, in many cases, a very poor reward. Mr. Thompson is ready to admit that most people in this country are convinced parsons are not necessary—except for occasions like funerals and weddings—and even then they can be dispensed with. So of what use are parsons?

Well, parsons can be used as lay-psychiatrists, visiting the sick, consoling the afflicted, and so on. Mr. Thompson does not appear to worry overmuch about the fundamentally Christian message. Jesus Christ is not in the picture at all. We agree that there may be room for somebody doing these typically secular functions, but why parsons? And in any case, would this kind of work deserve high salaries?

Writing in a Spiritualist journal, a reader detailed his difficulty in finding out "What is Religion?" We should have thought that his obvious answer was "Spiritualism," but he eventually came to the conclusion that, out of a bewildering multiplicity of definitions, the true one was "To know God." This seems to us perfect if there is a God but, as no one has yet managed to prove any Deity exists anywhere, "To know God" is just gibberish. But perhaps that is what religion really is!

Whether we are recording welcome news or not may be a matter of opinion, but Mr. "Misery" Martin, who gained a fine reputation in this country as the gentleman who has worked for over 26 years to make Sunday the most miserable day of the week, a day of Sabbatarian gloom of the darkest kind, and one on which no smile—except to welcome God—allowed to appear, is retiring from his secretarial post as the most envied man in England, that is, from the Lord's Day Observance Society. We hope the awful pain he must have regularly received when he saw his Pagan countrymen and women enjoying themselves on the Sabbath was not a contributory cause to his retirement—though, if it was, he has our deepest sympathies. May he still make many thousands of Sundays as miserable as possible—for himself!

We have never been quite sure whether the "service" held in St. Paul's Cathedral at the opening of an election campaign, and which is attended by nearly all the members, is to ask God to get the right party in, or to get the party in which God himself prefers, or merely to give the Archbishop of Canterbury a spot of work so that the Church is not entirely left out in the coming struggle. Mr. Alastair Forbes, the political writer of the *Sunday Dispatch* has however, the temerity to question whether the custom of holding such a service is a "happy" one? He appears to think no "spiritual" good is likely to come from "a confusion of sanctimoniousness with sanctity." Beware, Mr. Forbes, you are touching dangerous ground. And in any case how dare you criticise a function presided over by God's representative? What do you know of the beauties of religious fervour!

The discussions on sex problems which have been a feature of *Picture Post* for some weeks have resulted in the journal being banned from Eire on the grounds of "indecentcy." We are not surprised. Eire is under the domination of the Roman Church and therefore Roman Catholicism can do what it likes. Its censorship is as severe as in the Middle Ages—and this should be a lesson for all those who listen to the "Church" here in England. It has no power here, but doesn't it wish it had!

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, giving as long notice as possible.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Nottingham readers will be able to hear Mr. R. H. Rosetti twice to-day (October 28). At 2-30, he will lecture at the Cosmopolitan Debating Society, Technical College, Shakespeare Street, on "Man's Animal Ancestry," and for the local N.S.S. Branch, at 7 p.m., in the Trades Hall, Thurland Street, on "God or Man?" In both cases, admission is free, with questions and discussion.

Mr. Harry Cleaver, the energetic secretary of the West London Branch N.S.S., is to be congratulated upon a most varied and stimulating lecture syllabus for the winter of 1951-52. Following upon a most successful debate between that veteran protagonist of militant secularism, Mr. Len Ebury, and a well-known Christian speaker, Mr. Tom Sargant, upon the previous Sunday, a lecture of a most unusual character was given at "The Laurie Arms," Edgware Road, London, W., the usual meeting place of the branch. Mr. Alec Craig, author of "The Banned Books of England," spoke upon this title. Limiting his remarks to cases of prosecutions for obscenity during the last ten years, Mr. Craig gave a lucid exposition both of the present state of the law governing such prosecutions, and of the broad issues involved in so far as they affect the freedom of the subject. In reply to questions, the lecturer indicated that, in his personal opinion, obscenity was a matter of taste, and ought never to become the subject of criminal proceedings, though there were some books unfit for general release. An admirable lecture upon a highly specialised subject was ably chaired by the branch president, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, and was followed by a stimulating discussion.

Manchester has long been renowned for its intellectual, equally with its economic priority. In the latter capacity, it was the economic capital of Lancashire at a time when it was proverbial that "what Lancashire thinks to-day, England thinks tomorrow." In the intellectual sphere, Manchester has harboured many fine movements for the advancement of mankind. For some time past, a vigorous local branch of the National Secular Society has been making its imprint upon the life of the city, as the weekly lecture notices of this journal eloquently demonstrate. Recently, Manchester University produced a most promising "Rationalist Society" distinguished by youthful enthusiasm, which was visited earlier this year by a speaker from N.S.S. Headquarters. Another rationalist organisation, the "Manchester Humanist Fellowship," affiliated to the "Ethical Union" and closely associated with the "R.P.A.," is launching a most attractive winter syllabus, details of which will, henceforth, be found in our column of "Lecture Notices."

## The Freethinker Fund

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To find space for the numerous articles awaiting publication we shall acknowledge all contributions by post instead of printing lists.

**is now open**

## ON EVOLUTION AGAIN

THROUGH the kindness of our old friend, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, I have been able to see the reply made to my recent article on Evolution by the Rector of Bucknall, Staffs., the Rev. E. K. Victor Pearce. He complains that I fall back "on verbosity" pleading that I "have no space to state the facts"—like "most Evolutionists." This almost takes my breath away! I have always acknowledged that most parsons are intelligent men (realising that, after all, they have to earn their living which accounted for their "faith" in Miracles, Gods, Devils, etc.) but here is Mr. Pearce expecting me to state the facts of Evolution in a page and complaining that Evolutionists rarely do so!

The great Evolutionists—Lamarck, Darwin, Wallace, Haeckel, Huxley, Spencer, Lyell and hundreds of others, wrote elaborate and fully documented works packed with detail and facts. Not even God Almighty could have boiled down what they say on to a page of this journal. The facts upon which Evolution is based are acknowledged by nearly every living scientist, the dissentients being—as can be expected—the followers of a lunatic like "Judge" Rutherford, known as "Jehovah's Witnesses," Christadelphians, and similar obscure Christian sects, and a few Bible believers like Mr. Douglas Dewar and his friends who like to think that they are "scientists" but whose "science," based on the most primitive myths and legends, have made them the laughing-stock of the world—except, of course, to the Bible believers I have mentioned.

Mr. Pearce says that I "have no facts to give" and I "merely enlarge" the plea that everybody believes in Evolution. And he asks me to remember that at one time "everybody thought the earth was flat." This is rather a curious argument to come from a Bible believer, because all flat-earthists based their principal argument on the "fact" that it must be flat because the Bible says so. I have met modern flat-earthists who were shocked almost to tears when I said that God's Holy Word on this point at least was complete balderdash. I am delighted to think that here Mr. Pearce and I are in agreement.

I pointed out that "people like Mr. Dewar and his Genesis-minded friends" were ignored, and it can hardly be believed that Mr. Pearce takes this as proof that I (or we) deny them the right of Free Speech! Really, I shall have to take back my idea that most parsons are intelligent men. Mr. Dewar and his friends have the fullest liberty to publish any book they like against Evolution, they have every right to propagate their anti-Evolution ideas in lectures and articles and, as far as we Freethinkers are concerned, they would be championed by us to say what they like on the radio. If their views are ignored, it is for exactly the same reason that Mr. Pearce ignores the flat-earthists in spite of the fact that

they are far more devout believers in the Bible than he is. We certainly "clamour" for "free speech" (as he indicates in his letter) and under no circumstances would we suppress it. But *ignoring* the imbecilities of rabid anti-Evolutionists is not a denial of Free Speech. Scientists have no time constantly to answer objections to Evolution which have been answered hundreds of times in standard works. That Mr. Pearce is not satisfied with the answers is quite another matter.

If "free debate" is denied, as he says in his letter, by the B.B.C., it is denied *not* by Freethinkers, but by a Christian dominated staff. The B.B.C. has a Christian directorate and this takes good care to bar any opposition—and I venture to say it would be backed to the utmost by Mr. Pearce. Would he for example plead that I, who do not believe that such a person as Jesus Christ ever lived, that he is as mythical a person as Jupiter or Horus, be allowed an hour on the radio to expound my theory? Under a purely secular directorate religion would be treated like any other subject—for and against. Under the Christian domination favoured by Mr. Pearce, no subject is allowed unless it passes a Christian censor. The fact that anti-Evolutionists are barred from putting their case before the microphone shows that even Christian directors draw the line at balderdash. It is one thing to force upon helpless children "special Creation" because the Bible tells us so, but quite another thing to bring this hopeless nonsense these days to a well-read public who had the privilege of an education dominated by science.

Needless to say, when I asked Mr. Pearce to give us some of the "evidence" for Bible stories which he is bound to believe in, and bound to teach the poor boobs who compose his flock, he answers me by saying, "I do not recognise some of the incidents H. Cutner thinks are in the Bible." Thinks! He knows perfectly well that they are all in the Bible. If he throws them overboard it is because we Freethinkers have made him ashamed of such holy bilge—ashamed that anybody with a spark of intelligence should be asked to believe myths and legends composed when sheer ignorance dominated mankind. Mr. Pearce should say outright—he can do so in these columns if he likes—that he does not believe in a Serpent speaking pure Hebrew; and then explain why, if no such Serpent ever existed, we are told his story in "Holy Writ"—which means that God wrote it or inspired it. Naturally, if the serpent is a myth, then the story of the Fall of Man is mythical, and I want Mr. Pearce to explain then why, if there was no Fall of Man, there was any necessity for a Saviour?

But though he may be ready to throw overboard the Serpent, he holds fast to the Flood—this, he says, has been proved by "archaeological discovery." There have been no archaeological discoveries whatever which have shown that the whole Earth was covered by water, covering the highest mountains, and Mr. Pearce knows it; but we Freethinkers are more interested in the Ark—does Mr. Pearce believe that it contained all living creatures without exception? Including the 800,000 kinds of beetles, flies, etc., we have, for example, and, all the result of "Special Creation?"

To revert back to Evolution—there is one point which is not always clear. Very nearly every scientist living believes in Evolution, but there is, naturally, a diversity of opinion as to the *method*. Nobody knows how Evolution has worked. We are just as ignorant about a tree bearing apples, a match striking a light, a conglomeration of wires and valves giving us a radio set, and so on. When we come to examine "Nature," all that

we can truly say is that, under certain circumstances, certain things happen. Everything in Nature is "wonderful," and there should be no more wonder expressed that species in the course of millions of years change, than a reddish cow, eating green grass, gives us white milk. No scientist can *explain* the wonders of Nature, he can only classify them. But this has never been enough for our priests and parsons, and these gentlemen actually imagine that by waving a book containing a number of Hebrew and Greek myths and yelling, "God did it," they have shown the how and the why in Nature.

Fortunately for the sanity of mankind numbers of them are beginning to see how naive and infantile they are.

In a succeeding article I want to add just a few rather more definite statements on Evolution, and deal with a few of the objections.

H. CUTNER.

### BOOK REVIEW

*Secrets of an Author*, by Peter Fontaine. Watts Thrift Books; 1s.

"It is high time that I should warn you that your chances of ever making a decent living from writing books, unless you become a best-seller, are so slender as to be almost negligible." From which melancholy situation Mr. Peter Fontaine draws the wise conclusion: "When you want to discuss literature you should talk to bankers; writers talk about money all the time."

However, despite the sad state of things depicted above, most people, at some time or other, seem to experience the itch to "turn author." Consequently, a book upon the alluring subject of *The Secrets of an Author* ought always to command a ready sale. When, as in the case of the book at present under review, the author is readable, witty, obviously knows his subject, the technique of authorship inside-out, and is, in addition, issued at what is nowadays the merely nominal price of 1s., the probability of a wide circulation becomes a virtual certainty.

In this latest *Thrift Book*, Mr. Peter Fontaine, its Anglo-French author, discusses with technical competence spiced with Gallic wit, the literary and business problems which confront the beginner in what is nowadays both the art and the trade of literature. The apprentice in letters is, indeed, fortunate to be able to enjoy the guidance of so urbane and amusing a guide through the literary labyrinth. Pretty well everything the beginner in literature wants to know about, how and what to write, whom to approach with the finished manuscript, and how to market and produce his or her literary wares, will be found in the 81 pages of this informative little book; it will not be Mr. Fontaine's fault if his readers fail to become "best-sellers." The partly French author, a graduate of Cambridge and a veteran of Verdun, adds to the value of his literary textbook by imparting valuable information upon the use (and abuse!) of the French language in quotation by English writers.

Of equal literary and historical interest is a little-known letter, quoted here in full, of the future Emperor Napoleon, written when its author was an unknown, young artillery officer, and describing the execution of Louis XVI.

Mr. Fontaine carries his learning with typically Gallic lightness and lucidity. Throughout this comprehensive little book his wit will charm whilst his erudition instructs. A splendid little book upon which we congratulate its enterprising publishers, and which it now only remains for us warmly to recommend to the readers of this journal, whether aspirants to, or readers of literature.

F. A. R.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## FOOTE AND MEREDITH

SIR,—The letters of George Meredith, collected and edited by his son, were published in two volumes in 1912 by Constable and Co. The collection contains five letters written to Mr Foote and there are references to him in three others. I have the volume.

The following quotations will, I think, show that you are unjust to Meredith's son (unintentionally, no doubt) in your Sugar Plums in this week's *The Freethinker*.

"I admire the fight you are making, and class you among the true Soldiers Heinrich Heine called himself for doing battle with the pen."

"You carry on a brave battle for the best of causes, personally profitless as you must know it to be."

"Priests' opium."

In a letter (not to G. W. Foote) Meredith wrote: "I hold commonly that donations and subscriptions should be anonymous. But in the case of testimony to a man's high and constant courage, the name is rightly an accompaniment." (This refers to a testimonial to G. W. Foote.)

The last letter in the collection is addressed to Theodore Watts Dunton on the death of Swinburne. This is dated April 13, 1909. A footnote to the letter states: "This was George Meredith's last letter."

After Meredith's letters were published an article by G. W. Foote appeared in the *English Review*. (I have the article stripped from the magazine. Unfortunately, there is no date of publication on it.) In this article Foote asks:

"Meredith's last letter—who has it?" Foote received a letter from Meredith dated April 27, 1909, "so mine must actually be the last letter." The letter contains the following: "As a question of supporting your paper, my name is at your disposal." Foote's comment: "It follows, therefore, that the last document from George Meredith's pen was a letter of encouragement to the editor of *The Freethinker*." Foote states that he sent a copy of this letter to the editor of the collection but thinks it must have been overlooked.

I think that what I have written shows that Meredith's son did not try to hide his father's opinions of Mr. Foote or "The Cause" from the public.

It must have made Mr. Foote happy to see even some of the letters he received from the Poet and Novelist in the published collection.

—Yours, etc.,

L. B. HEWETT.

## R.101 CASE AGAIN

SIR,—As my name is mentioned in your review of *The Biography of a Ghost Hunter* by Paul Tabori (issue of October 10, 1951), I should like to say that there is no evidence whatever that the published reports of the R.101 sitting were made up (Mr. Cutner's italics); and in the absence of any evidence whatsoever for this statement, it should not have been made.

Nor does Mr. Cutner quote me exactly in what I said about the secretary's shorthand notes. She had difficulty in getting down accurately what the medium said, as it went very quickly. For all I (or Mr. Cutner) can know, it might have been very remarkable evidence if she had got it all down. Many people think what she did get down was very remarkable. It is extremely unlikely, in my personal view, that the printed account did not correspond with the original notes, though, since the original manuscript is not available, I cannot prove this contention. Lack of space forbids me giving reasons for my view.

I do not consider this R.101 sitting very good evidence. But as I was present at the time (though not at the sitting), I feel it incumbent upon me to correct misleading statements.—Yours, etc.,

K. M. GOLDNEY.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

SIR,—I wish to express my strong disapproval of an item in the theatre criticism of Raymond Douglas. He says of Tamburlaine, "he had three sons, two of whom were warriors, but the third is a coward—a kind of conscientious objector." This is an utterly stupid remark. The fact that the third son was not like his father or brothers would suggest that he would not commit the atrocities of his father. Must he be called a coward for this? Mr. Raymond Douglas can have no idea of what constitutes a conscientious objector. I definitely would not disembowel a fellow creature with a bayonet or take his life in any other way, say drop a bomb and wipe out thousands—men, women, children—indiscriminately. What have all the so-called warriors got to show for all their bloody work? The gigantic horrors of the two world wars will be dwarfed by the third now being prepared for. Will Mr. Raymond Douglas release the first or any subsequent atom or hydrogen bomb? Probably he will leave that to someone else, but he will eulogise such action should he survive, as to-day the dam busters, who drowned 18,000 people, are being boosted. What hopes can we have for the future?

—Yours, etc.,

EDMUND J. FORD.

## RACIALISM

SIR,—I am sorry that my reference in a recent poem to the Japanese people as "these Yellow Dwarfs" should be regarded as abuse. Any Japanese Rationalists (if not liquidated for "Dangerous Thought") would hardly be shaken by this term. Being Rationalists, they would, *ex hypothesi*, be cultured, and being cultured, they would know that for the last 3,000 years the Chinese Classics have referred to the Japanese by this term, in the same way as Korea is called "The Land of the Morning Calm." (Ironic, isn't it?) Mr. Uloth agrees that the Japanese are cruel, why boggle at calling them dwarfs and yellow? Aren't they? Look at the Press and film pictures of their Premier at San Francisco recently. Why cannot a poet say it in ironically congratulating the Almighty on this particular creation?

On general principles, that a work of art is to be taken or rejected, I would have left Mr. Uloth's letter unanswered. But I cannot pass his implication that I am that horrid thing a "racialist." He is right, a racist is not a Freethinker, and I value that name. A man that points out that a people is cruel, yellow, short, and treacherous is not a racist if he does not seek to incite others against them. I merely expressed my regret that the Governments of the U.S.A., Great Britain, and 46 other countries, without consulting their own people, should hasten to bring aid and comfort to a cruel race. I call such men vile. As a Freethinker, I have a right to say this, *contra mundum*; as a Poet, a duty on behalf of the thousands of the inarticulate who share my view.—Yours, etc.,

BAYARD SIMMONS.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## OUTDOOR

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m. Speaker: G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, October 13, 6-30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

## INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. E. W. SHAW, "The Menace of Modern Political Roman Catholicism."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Mr. JOHN BOLTON (Leeds V.S.), "Why I am a Vegetarian."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 30, 7 p.m.: M. BEDDOW BAYLEY, M.R.G.S., L.R.C.P., "The Problem of Vivisection."

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. OLIVER BROWN, M.A., "Scotland and Religion."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Dr. STARK MURRAY, "The Science of Health."

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Week-End School, Lyme Hall, Disley, Cheshire).—Saturday and Sunday, October 27-28: Messrs. CAMPAIGNE, COLCLOUGH and VESSELS, "Films and Society," with film illustrations.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (President, N.S.S.), "God or Man?"

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (President, N.S.S.), "Man's Animal Ancestry."

South London Branch N.S.S. (London and Brighton Hotel, Queen's Road, Peckham, S.E.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (Editor, *The Freethinker*), "The Russian Revolution in World Politics."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 28, 11 a.m.: Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., L.L.D., "The Universities in a Changing World."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: The Rev. W. I. PIGGOTT (London and Provincial Anti-Vivisection Society), "Vivisection and Animal Rights."

WANTED books by Grant Allen, Geoffery Gorer, J. B. Hannay (Religious Evolution Research Society) pub. Oakshott, 17 Philpot Lane, E.C. Particulars—prices. POLLARD, Naddewater, Exeter.

## THE CRISIS OF OUR TIMES— AN INTERPRETATION

(Concluded from page 367)

If the practice of individual analysis has had little influence on the policy of those who wield power in the U.S.A., Freudian doctrines have not so far had the chance to influence the leaders of the Soviet world. The great benefits, in terms of economic and social betterment, that the Soviet regime has brought to the majority of people living in the great land mass that lies between the Baltic and the Bering Straits, cannot be denied. Nevertheless it is sheer intellectual cowardice to refuse criticism of the unpleasant features which characterise this regime, merely because there is at the present so much hostile criticism which is vitiated and unfair. One of the results of the adherence to Marxian doctrine of the rulers of the U.S.S.R. is the discouragement, amounting in effect to a prohibition, of the study and practice of psycho-analytic doctrines and method. As far as can be gathered experimentalism and the clash of ideas has now been abandoned in psychology—a development paralleled in the field of education, the film, and music—and a rigid orthodoxy, a system of “surface” psychology, drawing largely on the ideas of Pavlov, has been imposed. Likewise, judging from recent issues of the *International Journal of Psycho-analysis*, the once flourishing Psycho-analytic Association in Budapest has been forced to discontinue its activities; similar developments have taken place in other capital cities east of the Elbe.

It would be pertinent to inquire why this should be so. In the first place such a work as *Civilisation and its Discontents* calls for a radical modification of the Marxian theory of the causes of war. There are doubtless always economic factors present in wars, and Capitalist society, if we are to accept the Marxian analysis, has a much greater economic need for war than any other previous form of society. In this lies the key to the hectic nature of the expansion of Hitlerite Germany and post-war U.S.A. Nevertheless the Marxian analysis is only valid for post-Renaissance society, whereas there have been wars throughout recorded history. This suggests that there are underlying determinants to be found in man's instinctual make up—what Freud calls “the constitutional tendency of people to commit aggressions against one another,” which precede the economic factors making for war. Such a theory, however, cannot be allowed by the policy makers of Moscow, since it will call in question their conviction that the responsibility for present world tension lies entirely with the “Anglo-American Imperialists.”

Likewise, revealing as it does its origins in infantile experience, psycho-analysis is destructive of the omnipotent Father Image—destructive therefore of infallible authority whether manifest in the field of religion or politics. To quote W. H. Auden:—

“The ancient cultures of conceit  
In his [Freud's] technique of unsettlement foresaw  
The fall of princes, the collapse of  
Their lucrative patterns of frustration.”

The trend which the Webbs had so many misgivings about in the 1930's, the near-deification of the dead Lenin, has now been transferred to the living Stalin. The “restorers” of the Roman Republic, although in fact absolute dictators, were no more at first than “heads” of the State, ruling according to the Constitution. Neverthe-

less by degrees they became more and more revered, until finally they were formally deified. The initial stages of such a process seems to be taking place with the erstwhile Secretary of the All-Union Communist Party. Stalin's leadership is “inspired.” According to reports floodlit portraits of him bedecked mountains at recent birthday celebrations. In Soviet literature he is spoken of in terms of reverential awe. The present Soviet bureaucracy has, consciously or unconsciously, taken a lesson from Dostoevski's legend of the Grand Inquisitor. Stalin seems to be replacing the Omnipotent Father of religion. (In this context the disbandment of the League of the Militant Godless appears in a new light.) The theory and practice of Freudian doctrine run counter to such hero-worship.

In the pamphlet already quoted Trotsky also wrote:—

“Once he has done with the anarchic forces of his own society, man will set to work on himself, in the pestle and retort of the chemist.”

Here Trotsky has externalised, and given an independent existence to “the anarchic forces of society,” which are surely, largely a reflection, and a part of, man's own nature. The statement should be revised. In order to achieve a harmonious society man must also set to work on the anarchic forces of himself—to use Trotsky's metaphor—“in the pestle and retort of the chemist.” Scientific techniques must be applied not only to the inanimate world of material nature, but also to the internal animate world of human nature. The human race must somehow come to terms with an instinctual and mental set-up, much of which is obsolete, and a survival from an archaic time before recorded history. The alternative is the termination of what may in the future be known as the era of ideological warfare, in a conflict which would make such a desert of this planet in thirty days, that the devastation caused by the last of the Wars of Religion in thirty years, would seem a veritable Garden of Eden.

A. P. PERRIN, B.A.

### TRAILER

I voted against Sunday pictures  
(I'm a weebegone Wesley wight);  
I know the Lord's wrathfullest strictures  
Were up against Sabbath delight;  
But now that they're going to open—  
Well, I must see old Charlie, to-night!

A. E. C.

### THEY STILL RUN

Recently two men were standing on the sideway of one of the busy streets of the town of Wrexham, in North Wales; they were old acquaintances, living in different parts of the country, and had met by chance; a well-clothed, well-fed, energetic and loud-voiced man accosted them: “Can you tell me if there are any Gospel Preachers in this town?” Both of the men smiled, and one said: “I am an Atheist and know no Gospel. The other man said: “I am very pleased to meet you. In the current issue of *The Freethinker* there is a record of the Bishop of London saying that his clergy find it very difficult to get into touch with Unbelievers; there is a café close at hand and we invite you to have a cup of coffee with us; we will listen to your statements if you will listen to ours.” The Pedlar of Hell-fire gave a horrified glance, said “No!” very emphatically, and hurried away.

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE PAPACY.** By F. A. Ridley.  
Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

**THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST.** By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.