

# THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The English Renaissance

WE recently had the opportunity of witnessing the revival of an ancient play written by one of the most extraordinary and tragic figures in English literature. We refer here to the recent production at the Old Vic Theatre of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, an early play of Shakespeare's most famous predecessor, which has not, we believe, been revived upon the London stage for several centuries. *Tamburlaine* itself is not exactly a dramatic masterpiece though, as a pioneering work in the evolution of English drama and of English poetry, it is stated to have had considerable historical significance. In itself, it is not much more than a crudely constructed and excessively gory melodrama; the prototype of quite a number of similar Elizabethan plays, including at least one such play—*Titus Andronicus*—doubtfully ascribed to Marlowe's greatest successor, the author who has passed into history under the name of William Shakespeare.

Marlowe himself, however, was a great poet whose untimely assassination in a tavern brawl at the early age of twenty-nine (1564-93), cut short a rapidly maturing career of the highest promise. But did it, in reality, do so? The numerous literary historians who unanimously deplore the crushing loss to English literature which was dealt by the dagger-thrust of Ingram Friezer (Marlowe's actual slayer), seem to ignore the very high degree of probability that Marlowe, in any case, would never have lived to see old age. For Marlowe, the first great poet of the English Renaissance, whose "mighty line" pointed forward to the glories of modern English poetry was, also, a son of the English Renaissance in another even more fundamental sense; the author of *Tamburlaine* was a reputed atheist, a member of "The School of Night," that circle of daring Freethinkers at the court of Queen Elizabeth and, it would seem, an associate of Giordano Bruno, the Italian arch-heretic of the Renaissance, who resided in England for several years and scattered the seeds of heresy far and wide before returning to Catholic Europe to meet his fiery doom at the stake in Rome (1600). Marlowe, indeed, seems to have been an apt disciple of the great Italian Freethinker. He is said to have revived the mediaeval scandal of *The Three Imposters*, Moses, Mohammed, and Jesus, who had successively deceived mankind (a book with this title was actually alleged to have circulated throughout the Middle Ages until suppressed by the Inquisition).

Be the above as it may, Marlowe was on the point of being haled before the Privy Council, along with his fellow student at "The School of Night," Sir Walter Raleigh, at the time of his sudden death. The cautious Raleigh, it is true, subsequently survived the ordeal, but it seems probable from what we know of him, that the tempestuous "Kit" Marlowe would have betrayed himself by some "blazing indiscretion" in examination by their lordships. We must not forget that, in the England of Elizabeth, death at the stake was still in active operation; at least one of Marlowe's teachers at Cambridge died by

fire for heresies much milder than those attributed to Marlowe, during the poet's own lifetime.

The age in which these early Freethinkers lived and in which "The School of Night" sheltered from the "avenging flames" of orthodoxy in the shadowy twilight which has since enveloped it, was an age of intellectual "rebirth" (renaissance), of mental revolution against the dead hand of the Middle Ages, and of the Feudal-clerical social order which embodied it. Against the claims of authority, the scholars and religious reformers of the period set up the claims of individual private judgment in religious matters whilst, simultaneously, the revolutionary classes of the 16th century, enriched by the gains of the newly-discovered "worlds" of East and West, defied the power of the feudal rulers of mediaeval Europe, with the Pope at their head, to appropriate the riches of Asia, Africa, and the Americas for their own exclusive advantage and, in opposition to the claims of the Vatican to rule the world with mediaeval authority, invented that doctrine of the modern State "over all persons and causes supreme," which has dominated the world from that day to this, and which, to-day, is only slowly giving way to ideas of world government. In all spheres alike, in religion, in politics, in art, in scholarship, in literature, the Renaissance represented an age of vehement protest and active revolution against the Christian Middle Ages.

In this revolution the England of Elizabeth and Marlowe played its full part. The self-same spirit which led "The School of Night" to challenge the authority of mediaeval theology, and which led Marlowe to improvise new literary forms instead of clinging blindly to mediaeval models, led their contemporary England to challenge the tremendous military power of the mighty Spanish Empire which, in alliance with the Pope and under the spiritual leadership of the Jesuits, was then engaged in forwarding the "counter-Reformation" of militant Catholicism in a gigantic crusade against the new age which the dynamic impact of the Reformation was just then bringing into existence. For England was an island situated in what was then styled, and marked on contemporary maps as "The Spanish Main." It was precisely for the express purpose of bringing England back to the fold of the Middle Ages and of the Catholic Church, that the Jesuits and their "Fifth Column" of English Catholics schemed and toiled incessantly, with the assassination of Queen Elizabeth and the restoration of the old pre-Reformation regime as their final goal.

Rome, however, had more powerful weapons in her arsenal than clerical traitors and assassins' daggers and "gunpowder plots." It was to restore the Middle Ages that, under a summer sky in the year 1588, the "Invincible Armada" of Spain came lumbering up the Channel in the formation of a crescent moon, flying a sacred banner blessed by the Pope, and with decks crowded with Spanish crusaders dedicated to the holy war for the extermination of heresy and heretics in England. This supreme ordeal for Elizabethan England transpired almost at the same

time as *Tamburlaine* first saw the light, and its horrors would, no doubt, have been rivalled, not in mediaeval Tartary but in Protestant England, had the Armada succeeded in its pious objective of landing the formidable Spanish infantry, the finest soldiers of their age, upon the English shores.

It was not a remote danger: had King Philip only taken the advice of the shrewd diplomats of maritime Venice, and built ships to brave the Atlantic breakers, instead of relying solely on vessels built exclusively for the tideless Mediterranean waters, the Armada might well have succeeded in extirpating the England of Marlowe and Raleigh with the *auto da fas* and torture-chambers of the Inquisition. Had this happened, England might still be where Spain is to-day; a relic of the Middle Ages and a vassal of Rome. Whilst English science and English democracy would have been strangled at birth along with English Freethought.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### ISRAEL IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN

THE scholarly Hebrew historian, Dr. A. A. Neumann's two-volume study, *The Jews in Spain* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948), is an instructive contribution to Iberian Jewry. He indicates how the Hitlerian persecution of the Jews in Germany was foreshadowed in Christian Spain by the periodical massacres and ultimate expulsion of the Chosen People under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.

The economic and social survey of Volume I is founded not only on the official records of the Castilian and Aragonese rulers, but on the extensive *responsa*—the records and decisions—of the Spanish rabbis. It is a pity that the records of the Moorish rulers were destroyed after the Christian reconquest of the peninsula, while the archives of the Spanish princes deal almost entirely with the fiscal and political relations of the Jews to their secular authorities. On the other hand, it appears that in the rabbinical records: "Customs of the community and ceremonies of the home, social manners and personal dress, the woes and joys of the communities, the moral and physical struggles of a people that feels itself in exile, are all depicted in living, faithful colours. . . . Precisely as the records of our higher Courts reflect, amidst the conflicts of individuals and the clashes of opposing interests, the essential characteristics of our political, economic and social order, so do the multiple records of the old rabbinic courts bring to light the moral, religious, political and economic problems that faced these communities."

To the Church the Jew was ever anathema and to the State a permanent source of revenue. Persecution in various guises was encouraged by the clergy who defamed the Jews as a race condemned eternally as the instigators of Christ's crucifixion. Yet these perverse people were the unwilling witnesses of the truth of the Saviour's death and resurrection. Thus, Church legislation was designed to degrade these stubborn unbelievers. But, albeit firm Catholics, the kings were usually inclined to protect and even favour the Jews as their personal possessions. They were the secular rulers' Jews, upon whom they could call for loans, benevolences and heavy taxation. Indeed, every favour granted them was handsomely paid for and naturally these alien and despised unbelievers consistently sought to sustain the goodwill of their sovereign. For royal protection, exercised by the kings and their officials,

was all that secured them from the antagonism of the clergy and the constant menace of fanatical mob violence.

Yet, the toleration displayed by Spanish kings towards their Jewish subjects, despite the maledictions of the Church, is in many ways remarkable. It is true that the territories the Spaniards were slowly recovering from the Moors were frequently the scene of civil warfare and that the nobles occasionally were in conflict with the Crown. Also, apart from semi-independent provinces, Spain was mainly divided by the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon until these two realms were united in the 15th century under Ferdinand and Isabella when, with the conquest of the last Moorish State of Granada, the Jews were expelled from the Iberian peninsula.

When James the Conqueror greatly increased his realm at the expense of the defeated Moors, he invited Jews to settle in his newly-acquired possessions. These emigrants were naturalised in Catalonia, Majorca and Valencia. Many arrived from Christian countries where persecution and spoliation were rife. Under James, in the 13th century, they received many benefits and in some provinces these settlers were provided with dwellings and pasture lands with complete proprietary rights. Similar privileges were granted emigrant Jews under Pedro III, while in the reign of Alfonso III further grants were given Jewish settlers. But these royal favours failed to prevent an appalling massacre of Spanish Jews in 1391. Stern measures were adopted to prevent the wholesale departure of the remaining Jews in the interest of the exchequer. Still, as Neumann avers: "Barring temporary fluctuations caused by war, anarchy, or civil strife, it was the fixed policy of Spanish rulers for over 500 years to conserve and to increase the number of Jews in their provinces and to protect their interests against the encroachments of the other elements of the Spanish population."

The Jews resided in special enclosures termed *judería* and, within these, their customs were observed and their sacred rites celebrated. This isolation was encouraged and, against Christian dissentients, the kings asserted that they alone exercised jurisdiction over Israel. James I of Spain and his successors treated the Jews as their exclusive care. Charges against them were to be investigated by royal officials and Pedro III even warned the Dominican friars when they engaged in an inquisition against the Barcelona Jews. Inquiries were the legal concern of the king and when a Jew was arbitrarily imprisoned by one of the sovereign's vassals, "Alfonso III ordered his release, for all Jews are under the protection and safeguard of the king."

Crown law and Jewish autonomy are dealt with and many remarkable details are discussed in this work. The administrators of the *judería* were responsible for the communal taxation and regulated many curious customs. Religious observances played a prominent part and heterodoxy was severely censured. Disciplinary excommunication, as in the case of Spinoza in later Holland, was the penalty for Freethought. As Neumann testifies: "The individual thus excommunicated was completely shut out from the life of the community. He was shunned as one within four cubits of whom no one was to sit, with whom no social or religious intercourse was permitted." Indeed, no one was allowed to render the guilty one any help whatever. He was thrust aside as an unclean and contaminating creature and, only in cases of actual starvation was anyone permitted to furnish him with the barest necessities of existence.

The chapter in Neumann's work relating to taxation is replete with interesting information, as is also its

successor which deals with the Courts, while the concluding chapter of Volume I, which describes minutely the system of loans, interest and monetary transactions generally, throws a flood of light on fiduciary affairs in the Medieval centuries in Spain.

The penultimate chapter is an informative survey of economic conditions in Spain in the Middle Ages. Not only was the Jew the leading financier, for he was active in the silk and other industries, foreign trade, and also an extensive agriculturist. As Neumann notes: "The numerous references to fields and pasture lands, orchards, gardens and vineyards indicate that many Jews followed agricultural pursuits—and lived freely outside the city limits in villages and country estates."

Jewish rights to engage in all departments of husbandry trade and industry were fully acknowledged by the Crown. Consequently, the Jew was not strictly confined to the usual judería. As our author avers: "It was only after the fearful massacres of 1391 and the wholesale destruction of Jewish communities that residence within the judería was made compulsory in various cities in order to allay the wrath of clerical fanaticism."

T. F. PALMER.

### REPRODUCTION, UNLIMITED

A CERTAIN fishing club I used to visit in my youth had a rule that all subjects might be discussed on its premises except politics or religion; apparently the club committee had come to the conclusion that the emotional content of such arguments outstripped the rational.

In the same way Neo-malthusianism seems to arouse more passion than balanced judgment in its assessment. The Neo-malthusian will point dramatically at the dire results of uncontrolled birth, dust bowls, diminishing resources and the like, while his opponent will airily "pooh-pooh" the danger. Why, he will retort, Malthus was preaching that gospel one hundred and fifty years ago, and look at us now—more people and less starvation than ever before! And it must be admitted that insofar he is right, even if he is committing the fundamental error of assuming that because an anticipated change has not yet occurred, therefore it never will. On the other hand, the Neo-malthusians, full of their big idea, are bursting to tell the world and, like other enthusiasts, in their missionary zeal they are a bit of a bore; they provoke one into taking an opposing point of view out of pure cussedness.

Yet the question is important, perhaps the most important social problem of our day. Aware as we are that the gloomy prophecies of the Reverend Malthus never came to pass, yet it is with a shock that we read the figures of population increase just published by the World Health Organisation. Mankind, we learn, has increased by 825,000,000 since this century opened. There are now over 2,400,000,000 of us and, at the present rate, within the lifetime of some of us there will be 5,000,000,000!

It will be of particular interest to readers of *The Freethinker* to hear that out of a list of 52 countries the only one whose population is decreasing is—that most Catholic and independent republic, Eire! That this land of saints should be the very spearhead of birth control will, I trust, give members of the N.S.S. cause to think.

But if Christianity, in the person of Catholic Ireland, is in the vanguard of the movement for control of our race, the leading protagonists of those two other world religions, Mohammedanism and Brahminism, are at the very tail. India and Pakistan together contribute 10 per cent. of the 50 per cent. world increase with their 140,000,000 souls and undernourished bodies.

It is interesting to note that the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. show the same rivalry in population increase as in most other things; each has added 74,000,000 cannon-fodder to their 1900 totals, though no doubt immigration will account for an appreciable portion of the American increase prior to 1921. The country recording the largest advance of all is Argentine with a 350 per cent. increase; this again, however, does not indicate a net increase so much as a shift in population towards the New World. This Britain of ours is more modest in its procreating activities, though alarming enough with 12½ million, carrying it over the 50,000,000 mark.

What are we to conclude from these figures even without further particulars of the incidence of the increase? For instance, what about the tendency to concentrate in the city centres? Take this London of ours: practically the whole of its 10 million population are parasites; in everything that is vital to modern life, such as foodstuffs, cotton and woollen materials, bricks, tools, kitchen utensils, essential chemicals, etc., London is a voracious consumer but has little to offer in exchange but razor blades, legal advice, cinema studios, the parliamentary talking-shop and such superfluities of our civilisation. It would be interesting to know how many non-producing members of our society have to be supported by the productive workers; certainly the proportion must be increasing. Nor do the new economies of the Marxist order show any better result in this respect. In the medieval economy nearly everybody was productive, which accounts for its enduring quality (in spite of dirt, ignorance and intellectual suppression by the Church) and the reserve of energy which it conserved for the benefit of the succeeding era of capitalism.

While a number of writers have emphasised the dangers in unrestricted reproduction of the species and in over-exploitation of Nature's resources, I do not recall seeing any authoritative work on this increase in the non-productive over the only source of real wealth, the productive worker. Like Sinbad, the producer has an old man of the sea on his back; but not just one, more and more of them are continually climbing on his back. How long and how far can this state of affairs go on?

P. C. KING.

**Lots of the poor chaps** at the front in Korea have been writing home that their lives have been saved because of the way bullets have been stopped by the Bible in their pockets—and lots more by a pack of cards. As far as saving life is concerned one is as good as the other; but is it not better, urge our parsons, to trust to the Bible rather than to a pack of cards? After all, is not the Bible our only hope of Precious Truth, our Salvation? That would be all right, but you can't play rummy or nap with the Bible; and anyway you can't win money—and what is more precious than that these days?

**The impudence of some Catholic priests** has no bounds as a recent case in Canada will prove. It appears that a Baptist minister complained to the postal authorities that his posted sermons never reached their destination; and the subsequent inquiry showed that, at the behest of an R.C. priest, they were always thrown into the fire on reaching the sorting office by an R.C. clerk. The priest proudly admitted the offence and was fined 100 dollars or a month. He should have both gone to prison and paid the fine.

### ACID DROPS

**A Muslim Sheikh** is stated to have delivered a speech in which he is alleged to have exhorted his co-religionists in Egypt to "pave the floor of Paradise with English skulls," which, we assume, is as near to Paradise as English "infidels" are ever likely to get. One is reminded of the early days of Islam, when "True Believers" rushed into battle crying: "Paradise is before us and the devil and hell-fire behind." To add to the attractions of the Muslim Paradise, every one of the "Faithful" reclines on golden couches, with seventy-two celestial "wives" apiece. It would be almost enough to bring the Christian skulls on "the floor of Paradise" back to life again!

**It is well-known** that the Athanasian Creed gives a very detailed, if not particularly intelligible definition of the most Holy Trinity. However, in matters appertaining to theology, as elsewhere, "brevity is the soul of wit." The palm for the most apt definition of the famous dogma goes, in our opinion, to a Japanese. This acute thinker had been listening for some time with a corrugated brow and growing bewilderment to the verbose explanations of the Christian missionaries. At last, however, his yellow features relaxed into a brilliant smile. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "I quite understand; a committee!"

**The blessings of true religion**, as evidenced in a recent case in Paris, will not, we fear, be trumpeted by the Faithful as something for all the world to see and follow. It appears that, as the Roman Church does not allow divorce and as a very pious factory foreman wanted a change, he promptly murdered his wife to "carry on" with the new love. He told the court that divorce was "an unforgivable sin," so what else could he do but murder the impediment to the union of true souls? Alas, a hard-headed but equally pious judge and jury sentenced him to death, callously rejecting his plea that murder was more forgivable than divorce. We wonder whether the Roman Church agrees?

**It is curious**, but we do not remember the roof of a pub or a cinema or even of a gambling den ever falling in and killing the wicked sinners who infuriate the Lord by enjoying themselves at these places. Yet over and over again roofs of churches fall in and invariably kill God's elect caught grovelling there on their knees. For example, ten people, including three children, were recently killed when the roof of a church fell in at Buenos Aires. They were praying for the recovery of Mme Peron, the wife of the Argentine President, and now the pious are not at all sure whether the anger of the Lord was directed against the lady or the grovellers. We don't know either.

**Our Catholic journals** hate any attack on that holy fraud, Lourdes, but they have to admit that the Rev. L. Weatherhead was quite right when he said that almost all the millions of sick people who go there to be cured, are *not* cured. Still, the halt, the blind, the deaf, the cancer-ridden pilgrims do receive one precious gift, urges the *Catholic Times*—they receive Grace, of course! One wonders whether sheer impudence could go much further than that.

**We have just enjoyed** the unusual pleasure of reading what must be one of the most curious documents ever penned—the regulations issued by the Spanish Inquisition to govern the use of torture. Some of these "regulations" were very surprising. The Grand Inquisitor himself must never be present at the actual "examination" (i.e., torture)

of the accused. Presumably, the Inquisitor's judicial impartiality might be affected by the "defendant's" yells. Another regulation laid it down that anyone medically certified as suffering from rupture was entitled to wear a truss when actually being "put to the question" on the rack—which was, no doubt, very helpful and calculated to give the victim a warm feeling of gratitude towards the Inquisition.

**At a recently-held** wrestling match in London, we learn that a large number of women spectators were present, that "the gentler sex" were conspicuous by their frenzied appeals to the wrestlers to tear each other limb from limb. All of which was, no doubt, very shocking and constitutes a most peculiar tribute to the civilising results of nineteen centuries of the religion of "the meek and lowly carpenter of Nazareth." These gentle ladies had, however, many Biblical prototypes in the holy women of old. Incidentally, we wonder what they would have said had they witnessed that stirring encounter in the Old Testament when, in a wrestling match of, apparently, an "all-in" character, Jacob put a "half-nelson" over upon the Angel of the Lord?

**In the Catholic Press** during recent months we have noted complaints that the Catechism is taught to children who are too young to understand the intricate dogmas which it expounds. Not long ago, we noted that a pious commentator upon the B.B.C. repeated this complaint. Certainly, it would be a most precocious infant who could really grasp such profound mysteries as the Holy and Undivided Trinity which, in any case, is "incomprehensible" by definition; or the mystery of Transubstantiation, by which bread is both bread and God simultaneously. However, Catholic children may as well begin early to study these questions; particularly as they are no more likely to understand them at seventy than they are at seven!

**Rogo in *The Recorder*** says he knew an avowedly Atheistic soldier who prayed to God when terribly frightened or terribly hurt. Brother, the conversion of Britain to Christianity is now dead easy—thanks to Rogo. See that everybody is terribly frightened, and terribly hurt and we have the whole country on its knees in prayer—praise the Lord, and Rogo's grey matter.

**An interesting anthology** could be compiled giving the reasons why some people have lived over 100 years—a bewildering variety of which, of course, would give no clue whatever as to how one sets about to become a centenarian. Plenty of pork, beer, and clay pipe smoking have been quoted, as well as a strict vegetarian diet; but we have never come across the claim that reading the Bible was the best method. This is the opinion of an American centenarian, Mr. J. L. Patton, who has never ceased reading the Book for 85 years. Some of us would rather die young.

**Some American journals** have been more than mildly surprised because when a negro murderer escaping from jail was caught again he was reading the Bible. But why surprised? After all, if he truly repented, there would be far more joy in Heaven when he was jerked to Jesus than if 99 ordinary folk were taken up to Kingdom Come. However, one fact does emerge—this particular murderer was not an Atheist, but a true blue Christian. And a Bible lover.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. W. I. McNATTIE.—We greatly regret delay in acknowledging your communication, but we certainly have no intention of re-opening the Symes case. Quite possibly, members of the Government knew only what they were told.

JEAN TOUDIC.—We thank you very much for your interesting items. We quite agree with your criticisms of Père Yoon's book on India.

H. SCOTT.—Your comments re "A Passing Star" and Mr. Nicholls are to the point.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 19s. 2d.; half-year, 9s. 7d.; three months, 4s. 11d.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

We are very pleased to learn that two recent front-page articles by the present editor, F. A. Ridley, have aroused considerable interest amongst our French friends across the Channel. The editorial entitled "The Church of Moscow versus the Church of Rome" was quoted at length by the well-known Syndicalist paper *R.P.* Whilst that self-styled "Ignatius Loyola versus the French Revolution," and dealing with the present clerical attack upon Secular education in France, was quoted at length in *Correspondence Socialiste Internationale*, besides arousing much interest in Masonic circles attached to "The Grand Orient." In the *Correspondence Socialiste Internationale* (organ of the Paris Labour Party), reference was also made to the "Acid Drops" column of *The Freethinker*. We welcome this manifestation of the international solidarity of Freethought in face of our world-wide enemy, the Church of Rome. We regard M. Marceau Pivert's forthcoming article in our columns as one of the most important that we have published for a long time.

Although recent events on the Continent have not improved the ground for Freethought, the World Union of Freethinkers is going ahead with arrangements for an International Freethought Congress in Belgium next year. It will be held in Brussels on August 23 to 25, 1952, and this forward announcement will enable readers bent on a Continental holiday next year to make the Congress a part of their programme. There should be a large contingent of British Freethinkers attending and it is an open secret that our friends across the channel are looking forward to making the contact.

We are glad to know that Mr. E. W. Shaw had a full house at Birmingham, and that his lecture was followed with interest and many questions. The local Branch has been fortunate in securing its present accommodation at Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, which is clean, comfortable and homely, with Secretary Smith always on the look out to welcome any new-comer.

Accrington and district readers can hear Mr. J. Clayton in the King's Hall Cinema at 6-30 p.m. to-day (November 11) when he will give an address on "Let Us Pray." Mr. Clayton has a large following around that area and all who can should make an effort to join him, and if possible bring some Christian friends.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

AT the end of October six months had passed since the Secular Society Limited took over the G. W. Foote Company which included The Pioneer Press and *The Freethinker*.

As was stated at the time, the outlook was grim, and the new Board of Directors which had been formed had a formidable task before it.

Unfortunately, the major trouble was a financial one and urgent steps had to be taken to deal with it. An appeal for a *Freethinker* Fund was made, and is still open. Numerically the contributions have been quite good, but the bulk of the contributions have been on the small side. What has come in to date has helped but has been quite inadequate for putting the paper on a sound financial basis.

The Board has therefore decided that the time has come to place before the reader in unmistakable language the actual financial position to-day.

In round figures the average weekly loss on *The Freethinker* is £40. At the end of October the contributions to *The Freethinker* Fund amounted to £226 5s. That is roughly £9 a week to meet the weekly loss of £40. Put in another way, a weekly loss of £31 has been accumulating for six months and now amounts to £806. To that, however, must be added the balance of debt incurred before the new Board of Directors took over, and the total debt on *The Freethinker* at the end of October was £1,180 9s. 1d. and is still mounting at the rate of £40 a week. Forty pounds a week to maintain the life of *The Freethinker*, which since 1881 has served the Freethought movement in this country as its uncompromising champion and advocate, is not a lot to ask from readers.

British Freethought could never have played the part that it has done in our social life without *The Freethinker*. It would be a sorry day for Freethought and a happy day for religion and the Churches if *The Freethinker* ceased to exist.

We must have that £40 per week. Shades of Bradlaugh, Foote, and their work and that of Chapman Cohen demand it. Their struggle and sacrifice in the dark days of religious spite and intolerance are worth something more than a memory. From now onwards we will publish in *The Freethinker* a weekly roll of honour with names and contributions from the soldiers of Freethought for carrying on the best of all causes, the fight for Freethought. The need was never greater so send your cheques, postal orders, bank notes, coin, stocks, shares, and legacies. Remember the target is £40 per week.

R. H. ROSETTI,

Chairman, G. W. Foote Company Ltd.

## IS EVOLUTION TRUE?

PRACTICALLY the whole strength of the anti-Evolution case lies in the extracts taken with great care from religious "scientists" and from what are called "admissions" from Evolutionists. Darwin, quite aware of the many difficulties which the theory has to face, always made guarded and modest statements, though as is well known he worked for 20 years before giving the world *The Origin of Species*. Huxley and Haeckel were more forthright, it is true, but they knew perfectly well that they had not said the last word on a theory which was practically in its infancy and which had to depend on so many factors and the interpretations therefrom.

No one has, of course, seen a "monkey" turn into a "man." No one has seen a mountain built up but, except

those who believe that the Alps and the Himalayas and the Andes and other mountain ranges were "created" by God on the third day, we knew that mountains indicate tremendous changes in the earth's crust sometimes due to volcanic eruptions, sometimes to the movements of terrific glaciers making "wrinkles" on the earth's surface, and sometimes due to the accumulation of earth over tremendous periods of time. Geologists date the Himalayas back to what they term the Cretaceous period, but for millions of years afterwards other changes must have taken place.

In other words, mountains have been "evolved," and as we see them now are the products of changes brought about by hundreds of millions of years. That is to say, no one has seen a mountain "evolved," no one has seen millions of things evolved which we know were different ages back—like coal. And to say that no one has seen a "monkey" change into a "man" is to say something which is hard to beat for hopeless ignorance.

We can only speculate what this globe of ours was like 2,000 million years ago, but there is no reason whatever why certain combinations of water, heat, light, and known earthly elements, could not form what we call *living* matter. It is true that Pasteur and others have proved that in *these days* all living matter comes from living matter, but the Earth was something quite different then from what it is now. Pasteur's experiments, always brought forward so eagerly by anti-Evolutionists, prove nothing except what happens now.

Anti-Evolutionists can protest as much as they like, but the fact remains that the being we call Man, judging from remains dated by all competent scientists as at least 30,000 years old, was certainly different from our modern Europeans. People like Mr. Douglas Dewar, and the rector of Bucknall, the Rev. Mr. Pearce, are quite convinced that all our white, black, red, and yellow races, the African pigmy, the Australian aborigine, and certain more or less obscure tribes of South America inhabiting the dense forests through which the Amazon flows, are all descended from Adam and Eve exactly as described in Genesis, through the sons of Noah after the Flood. This unmitigated balderdash has been given up even by many, if not most, Christians and it is sheer waste of time to discuss it. The "science" of Genesis is too silly to argue about.

When the anti-Evolutionist asks us to produce the "missing link," he knows perfectly well that, even if this were possible, he would still fall back upon Genesis. He would still explain to his anti-Evolution flock that it was not the missing link but an intermediate form specially designed by God Almighty to make things easier for his final "creation"—Man. I have often wondered why he does not deny that early Man came into the world as a baby seeing that the remains of newly-born babies dating, say, from the Stone Age, have never or very rarely been found.

This world of ours has undergone vast changes, catastrophes of terrific magnitude, many heat and ice ages, during its history, and in a way we can never really grasp what even such a comparatively short period as a million years can mean in that history. What we do know for certain is that the story unfolded by geological excavations and the science of physics—for example, the connection between uranium and lead—as well as the fossil remains of all kinds of extinct animals and other species point to a gradual change of everything that ever existed on earth, and we call that "Evolution." There is no other explanation.

Of course, there are religious "scientists" who deny everything but the Bible. They have no explanation whatever for the discoveries and theories of geologists and biologists except that Genesis says that they are wrong for "God did it." Their answer to the astronomer who points to the stars in Heaven, millions of them, stars without end, many a million times bigger than our sun is, God "made the stars also." Just as simple as that. We are told what "Erich Wassmann" said, or what "Prof. Virchow" said, or what "Prof. Owen" said. Wassmann, a Jesuit priest, with Virchow and Owen, belong to the 19th century and the world has moved since then. Of course, more modern "authorities" are often quoted like those on whom the Rev. Mr. Pearce depends. He tells us what "Lotka" and "Blum" and "Clark" say or think, just as if we all know their books as well as those of Darwin. Naturally, our religious scientists are not yet giving in when they can get so many boobs still to think that all human culture and knowledge are contained in the Bible—a book of Jewish and Pagan myths based on astrology and ignorance, but still devoutly believed in by millions of people; just as the similar nonsense found in Mahomedan and Hindu Bibles is believed in by Arabs and Hindus.

Science has always had to contend with religion. When the Church was powerful enough it destroyed with diabolical fury great spirits like Dolet, Vanini, and Bruno, and kept Europe in a state of appalling ignorance for over 1,000 years. The patient efforts of modern scientists to discover the history of our earth are still derided by God's elect—most of whom are probably sorry that they cannot emulate the murderers of Dolet and the other martyrs.

If Mr. Pearce reads this he will no doubt still protest that I have given no "facts" to prove the truth of Evolution. I never intended to do so in these columns. But any reader can study the theory for himself beginning with the classic *Origin of Species*, and he will learn more from a page of that immortal work than if he studied the Bible a thousand years.

And we can leave the anti-Evolutionists to wallow in their ignorance and stupidity and cling to the "God did it" explanation without any further notice.

H. CUTNER.

## THEATRE

### "The Passing Day" by George Shiels.

CAN a play with hardly a pleasant character be a good one? Go to see this one, and if you are not drawn to your seat till the last curtain I shall be much surprised.

Here is an example of the kind of society breeding the criminals they deserve. The play is dominated by one John Fibbs, who is a greedy, miserly skinflint of a merchant, and who does not appear to care who sinks so long as he keeps up, or who he rescues so long as he can benefit by it. In his shop he has a thirty-year-old nephew, who works for nothing. But the boy uses his guile to rob his uncle at every opportunity, and the uncle knows it in a vague sort of way but cannot do anything about it. Now John Fibbs's wife is a hard and grasping woman, who knows just how much to get out of her husband. There is no love lost between them, so when Fibbs makes his will he decides that a "fiver" will amply clear his conscience of obligation, both towards the boy and towards his wife.

Somehow both the boy and the wife are played against each other in expecting the fortune that the old man is

believed to have, so when he has a collapse they rush to the hospital unable to wait for the news that the end has come. And when eventually the old man passes on, having in his last breath given himself the satisfaction of telling them they had five pounds each, they swear and curse over his dead body, and the boy rushes off to an aunt who has been left the money.

Many other well-drawn and mainly-unpleasant characters are brought into this, and are introduced into the passing day of John Fibbs. The old man's part is most realistically played by Joseph Tomelty, the boy is done with great character by Allan McClelland, and the wife by Bee Duffell.

The mark of Tyrone Guthrie production is well recognised by his attention to detail and many small points that give humour and benefit the play.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

### THE LATE JOHN SEIBERT

Mr. John Seibert, shop manager to The Pioneer Press, and General Secretary of The National Secular Society died in hospital on November 5 after a long and painful illness. The cremation took place at the South London Crematorium, Rowan Road, London, S.W. 16, on Thursday, November 8 at 11-30 a.m. An obituary notice will appear in our next issue.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### THE DAM BUSTERS

SIR,—May I (also) express my disapproval of Edmund J. Ford's remarks on the "Dam Busters"?

Having read this episode, I can only say that I am proud, as a Briton, of the exploit.

This revealed the most intelligent planning; the highest mental and moral courage on the part of those who carried it out; a rejection of savagely indiscriminate bombing on the part of those who were ultimately responsible, which can only be, historically, commended.

I deplore the 18,000 dead. But would Edmund J. Ford be writing to *The Freethinker*?—would *The Freethinker* exist?—if these men had failed at the almost certain prospect of a ghastly death?—

Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

#### MUDDLED THINKING

SIR,—Surely a writer in this journal is allowed to say what he thinks about conscientious objectors or the Japanese warmongering monsters without being subject to the kind of whining and whimpering we get from people like Mr. Ford? As for the "dam busters," in the opinion of almost all intelligent people, they deserve our greatest gratitude for hitting the German warmongers where it hurt most. Mr. Ford's championship of *our* conscientious objectors and *German* warmongers is a typical example of his fuddled mind.

—Yours, etc.

J. R. R.

#### CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

SIR,—I am pleased to see that my criticism of *Tamburlaine the Great* has stirred in Mr. Edmund J. Ford feelings that are so closely akin to mine.

In taking exception to one of my sentences, Mr. Ford does not relate it to what precedes and what follows. Let me repeat it:

"He has three sons, two of whom are warriors and loved by him, but the third is a coward—a kind of conscientious objector—and he slays him with his own hand."

If Mr. Ford's onslaught were justified, obviously I should kill any conscientious objecting son of mine. But it so happens that I am not a Tamburlaine, though—for the purpose of criticism—I have to place myself in his position, as horrible as it is. The interpretation given of the character of this third son showed a certain amount of cowardice, a quality which is a curse to those who possess it and very difficult to overcome. As the boy also hated the shedding of blood and could not bring himself to fight, he was obviously a kind of C.O. We cannot get away from that, but Mr. Ford thinks I am making a generalisation by branding all C.O.s as cowards. From my personal contacts I know that some of the bravest men I have met were C.O.s.—Yours, etc.,

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

#### Report of Executive Meeting, 1st November, 1951

The President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Griffiths, Ridley, Hornibrook, Morris, Shaw, Ebury, Woodley, Johnson, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Barker, and Mrs. Venton.

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

New members were admitted to Bradford, Nottingham, and West London Branches.

Failing to get two clergymen to take part in a Brains Trust, it was agreed that an "Any Questions" on Religion or Secularism meeting be arranged in the Conway Hall for November 29. Lecture reports from Messrs. Brighton, Clayton, and Ridley were noted. Speakers for Bradford and Birmingham were appointed, and a grant of money to Birmingham made.

Evidence to be put before the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce by the Marriage Law Reform Society was held to be acceptable to the N.S.S. and endorsed. The Executive N.S.S. will forward evidence for the removal of the anomaly in Section 35 of the Marriage Act 1949 to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce.

Mr. F. A. Ridley's editorial on "A Secular Festival" in *The Freethinker* of October 21 is to be published as a leaflet for distribution.

Details in connection with the Annual Dinner in The Charing Cross Hotel on January 26 next were dealt with and instructions given.

The next meeting of the Executive will be held on Thursday, December 6.

The proceedings then closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, President.

### 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: F. A. RIDLEY and W. G. FRASER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, November 10, 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

Accrington (King's Hall Cinema).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON, "Let us Pray."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Mr. W. BARTHOLOMEW, M.A., "A Prepared Subject."

Brierfield (The Labour Club).—Friday, November 9, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON, "Let us Pray."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 13, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. GEORGE MUNRO (Scottish Dramatist), author of "Vineyard Street," "A Playwright's Pilgrimage."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. ROGER RICHMOND, "Freedom in Education."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. WALLACE L. LAWLER, "World Government."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, November 11, 11 a.m.: Mr. J. HUTTON HYND, "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Mr. E. W. SHAW, B.Sc., "Rationalism and Politics."

South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (London and Brighton Hotel, Queen's Road, Peckham S.E.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. LEN EBURY, a Lecture.

BOOKS, Freethought, etc., for Sale. Reasonable prices. Stamp for List. Charlton, 53, Gordon Street, Burnley, Lancs.

### FICTION, FACT AND WALES

THROUGH reading Welsh novels, I'd been warned about chapels. And I found them everywhere between Holyhead, where wind pennons sparkled with sea spray, and Caernarvon, where the police station has a wheel of swords visible at lighting-up time on the wall above some superintendent's desk.

I saw chapels like monster matchboxes with some of the sticks on show outside, like jails, like museums without treasures or as rejected models for unenterprising town halls, and I even saw a chapel like a barrel. It became a game of identifying the snakes that some top god had numbered for Medusa's hair; and as such it was bearable. It's what goes on behind the chapel facades—and psychologically the facade is, in its architectural pretension, the whole show—which cannot be borne.

Even Welsh ministers at times seem to want to escape from taboo; for there were two on the train from Wales, and both found the dining car where they serve four-legged chickens (it's always leg, isn't it?) and double brandies, ordered after a very careful look around.

Yet from my short stay in Wales I can bring back definite good news. In many of the pubs I saw advertisements begging citizens to turn leisure into pleasure and petition for the re-opening of bars which have been shut down through chapel influence. Here is a splendid crusade—the pub versus the chapel; and now the sparks may fly heavenwards, for Wales is waking up!

The power for good in the Welsh pubs is something for which Welsh books had not prepared me.

On my first night on Holyhead I climbed the rain-black stones to the obelisk with half a concrete boat, near the top, stuck to either side. It was like climbing up the ragged ridges of an old-fashioned paper weight; and then I looked down on the town. "As far as I can get," I told myself, "on one page of the International Students' Atlas which divides England and Wales into two sections; and now for the dour chapel men and mackintoshes rubbed to a satiny green."

For no Welsh novel or short story or topographical book had promised me the immediate and friendly welcome I was to find in the small pubs sometimes with counters reaching to nose-level.

In one intimate pub the rain was dripping through the ceiling, but the women made a place for me on a dry section of bench, and before I could settle a man was entertaining me with secrets of the reef which runs under the sea and across to Ireland. He was a member of the crew of a Trinity House boat replacing buoys, and they'd miscalculated and touched the reef; and after one caress of that sharp blade, the *first* estimate was £50,000 worth of damage. Then we were all laughing in a conspiracy about first estimates and how they wax to final figures sufficient to buy the bones of the thousand saints buried on Bardsey Island.

I told them that when all the present-day drinkers are under the soil, they could well boast of the bones of a thousand good men on Holyhead Island; and I wished them luck in their fight against the chapels. And it wasn't an exception, it wasn't because a port is enlightened by men coming and going on the big ships; I found the same welcome in pubs all over Anglesey, in little inns with lozenges of squashed pebbles over the lintels and in more plush saloons where oleographs displayed distinctively Victorian puppies barking at oil paintings of plumed-tailed dogs within the picture.

The friendly Wales in publand was a joyful surprise and a fine promise for all freethinkers.

But now let me leave Holyhead with its low tides and jetties creating eccentric horizons, with its crimsonest rust on boat houses and hospital on a pier, and approach Beaumaris where flood-lighting threw a concentric shadow-plan of the Castle flat on the ground and caused the custodian to extol the beauty of a derelict punt on the moat, a plain punt called "Lloyd George"!

In my time I've read countless historical novels with border-Castle backgrounds; but why have I never read one about a normal size castle, why has no novelist made capital of the nightmare I glimpsed at Beaumaris?

Such castles as I'd seen before had been in too poor a state of preservation; but at Beaumaris one can walk inside the wall and find the chambers and chapels, the passages, stairs, kitchens and garderobes which are not rooms with walls built round them, but rooms *in* the wall, dimly lit by some flicker of light from a "murder hole" or unlit like a spider's lair where such words as "majesty" or "dignity" must rot on the poisoned air.

Stop thinking of castle walls as props which once supported roofs (they didn't), and see them as the castle, and then you have a narrow and suffocating world. Now one visions—as one never does in any historical novel—rats dressed as kings, mice in armour, beetles robed as cardinals, bishops, priests, page-boys like pale and licentious lice, and all the things which still scuttle and scurry horribly out of sight in old houses enlarged in a dark spasm of fear, an horrid insect-play which might be forgotten for an hour in the Great Hall (a room, as we know it, outside the wall) but which would return as one crept and clanked, tripped and threw, squeezed and wheezed down slotted tunnels to turn with black eyes for rest in some coffin behind quarried wainscoting.

I was so overwhelmed, I decided to change my itinerary: I had meant to spend my rationed holiday in Anglesey, but I crossed the Menai Straits to Caernarvon to break the haunt with the exceptional dimensions of the Castle there. Here again men still lived, for the most part, *inside* walls; but with such a towering structure of wall there was room for play-acting, for gestures, for thinking unrodent thoughts and planning helmeted heads, still on the copings, to deceive attackers into believing the garrison was on the look-out.

Fabulous Caernarvon Castle! It broke the claustrophobic spell of Beaumaris; but the castle world remains a cruel, hard dream. That chapels found a place in this dream is highly indicative; and even now I can shut my eyes and see those beetle priests squirming in the interstices of Beaumaris!

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

### OBITUARY

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Leonard Charles Roberts, Six Bells, Abertillery, Mon., on October 17 last. He was a well-known figure in the district, and his work as an Insurance Agent brought him into contact with a large number of people.

A man of great personality and a clever debater, he never hid his Freethought opinions and his death in his 56th year, following an operation, came as a shock to the district.

On October 22, after a short secular service at his home, a large number of relatives and friends travelled to Pontypridd where his remains were cremated.

A secular service was read by Mr. J. S. Wilde, Cardiff. Our sympathy goes to his widow; and the Freethought movement is poorer by his death.

J. S. W.