

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXI—No. 47

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Saint Guy!

DURING the course of the past few days prior to writing the present lines, the night sky has been red with bonfires and the ear has been deafened with the heavy echo of fireworks dulled by a steady drizzle of November rain. All in honour of quite the most peculiar figure in what may be accurately termed the national mythology of the English people. For the shadowy historical figure who emerged for one brief and tragic moment onto the stage of English history has been metamorphized by the hand of time and the play of circumstances into a saint. A most peculiar saint but, notwithstanding, perhaps the best known of all English saints. Fate has turned the 16th century Yorkshireman, Guy Fawkes into a saint. Saint Guy of the "Gunpowder Plot," annually commemorated by the Fifth of November, Saint Guy's day.

The startling events which transpired in the early years of the 17th century and which form the—shall we say?—quasi historical foundation of the legend, belonged to the shadowy underworld of the politics of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Guy Fawkes himself, the historical executive of the projected "Gunpowder Plot" which was nipped in the bud upon November 5, 1605, was, at least, an historical figure who belonged to the shadowy Jesuitical twilight of plot and counter-plot which characterised the era in question. Though, apart from the fact that the most famous of English conspirators was a Yorkshireman, born in York in 1570, and that he subsequently served in the Spanish Army, the great champion of militant Catholicism (according to one account, in the Spanish Armada of 1588), nothing is known for certain about the enigmatic Fawkes himself. The light of history burns much less clearly in this respect upon "Saint Guy" than the lights of subsequent Fifths of November have burned from then to now upon his effigy!

When we turn from the man, Guy Fawkes himself, to the event "The Gunpowder Plot" itself, we are actually upon ground that is not really much firmer. There is, of course, an official version of the incidents of the "Gunpowder Plot" which—as Lord Macaulay was fond of expressing it—"is known to every schoolboy." Traditions which are "known to every schoolboy" are themselves usually open to suspicion. It is really hardly necessary to remind the readers of a Freethought journal of this fact! What actually was "The Gunpowder Plot?" Was there really a "Plot" at all? Was Fawkes himself the grim conspirator of official history, who went with suicidal courage into the vaults of Parliament for the purpose of "translating" its members heavenwards? Or was he, in reality, the stupid dupe of cleverer men than himself? A kind of 17th-century "Van Der Lubbe"—to make an apposite comparison with another mysterious plot in our own times.

It is not easy to say, for the official version is that of interested parties and the facts upon which it was based were, in any case, mostly obtained by the ferocious

torture of the defendants, including Fawkes himself. Before quitting this aspect of what will now probably always remain an insoluble mystery, we will merely remark that the official version which has now passed into history, contains many highly suspicious features. The England of the early Stuarts was, in many ways, more analagous to a totalitarian state than to a modern democracy, and it seems probable that the old English ministers of Queen Elizabeth, Robert Cecil et al., who controlled the very efficient English "political police" of the period, were vitally interested in frightening the new Scottish King of England, James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England (1603-25) and his Scottish favourites—it was, perhaps, not an accident that, when the King asked the newly-arrested Fawkes what he was in the cellar for, he replied: "To blow all the Scotsmen back to Scotland." The fact that James himself "discovered" (with, no doubt, some prompting from—who?) that "gunpowder" was to be used, is, also, highly suspicious, since James, a notorious coward, feared death by gunpowder more than anything else, since his father, Lord Darnley, had died as the victim of an earlier Scottish "gunpowder plot."

What all the above adds up to, we will now probably never know, apart from some fortunate but now unlikely discovery in the archives. At any rate, there is no question but that the contemporary English public believed in the genuine nature of the activities of Guy Fawkes and his backers. Nor is it doubtful that, when James and his ministers set aside November the Fifth as a day of "perpetual thanksgiving and rejoicing at His Majesty's happy delivery," and that of the English State and the Protestant religion, they were sincerely relieved at what they took to be a narrow escape. No one then foresaw that the festival then established would finally pass from contemporary tragedy into posthumous comedy.

The English people and the Protestant Churches had every reason in the year 1605 still to fear the twin phenomena of Spanish invasion and Catholic restoration. For the strong hand of Queen Elizabeth had only recently been removed, and only fifteen years had passed since the Spanish Armada had menaced the very existence of England and of the Protestant Faith. Moreover, it would seem that the importance of the English victory has been unduly emphasised by English historians. Spain still remained the dominant world power until well into the 17th century. Another Armada was by no means out of the question, in fact, Spanish troops had actually made landings in Ireland and Cornwall in the last years of Elizabeth, and the feeble James, "God's silly vassal" as his subjects in Scotland called him, was not the man to ride the storm. If the leaders of the Protestant regime in England had actually died at one blow, could England have continued her resistance?

It was in such an atmosphere of Jesuit intrigue that the Fawkes legend arose. The annual carnival of November the 5th was a recurring testimony to England's fundamental Protestantism. The burning in effigy of Fawkes

was a constant reminder to good Protestants of the fate that awaited them if Spain and the Jesuits were to prevail. As the festival developed over the years it, no doubt, borrowed its present picturesque details from ancient pagan fire festivals, such as that still celebrated annually in Helston, Cornwall, perhaps, as the fireworks explode around the burning "guy," in some dim corner of the Elysian Fields the grim Anglo-Spanish champion of the Counter-Reformation, who bore torture unflinchingly on behalf of his fanatical Faith, may be marvelling at his posthumous transformation into a figure of fun, into a national bogey for children annually lightening up the night sky amid the winds and rains of November!

F. A. RIDLEY.

OUR FLAT EARTH AND THE BIBLE

NO one need be surprised that our anti-Evolutionist rector, the Rev. Mr. Pearce, should prefer discussing the Bible and its strongest supporters, the flat earthists, rather than Evolution; and as many readers, no doubt, are unaware of some of the arguments used by them (and indeed they are heartily entertaining) it might well be worth looking into the matter.

And first let us notice Mr. Pearce referring to Job as proving that the earth is not flat but a globe. Job is one of the most interesting books in the Bible because, like Ecclesiastes, it is doubtful if it was written by a believer at all. The version we have is one undoubtedly "edited" before being admitted into the Canon; and by "edited" I mean changed to square as much as possible with a "late" Judaism.

In any case, the most remarkable feature the Bible presents to us is the way in which almost any positive statement found in one part can be easily contradicted by one found in another part. Moreover, I have found in discussion with parsons that nearly any of the beautiful teachings of Jesus, for example, I quote to a parson never means what it says. The way the English language almost always means the opposite when used by Jesus is astonishing.

I am not sure whether a flat earthist calls himself a Zetetic of a Zeteticist though it doesn't matter which. But at the outset, a Zeteticist will point out in proof of a flat earth, the very first verse in the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" for if God had made the earth into "a spinning top" he would have said so. Moreover, please notice that God did not make the sun first but the earth; that is, the ignorant theory propagated by infidels that the earth may possibly have been part of the sun is exploded by God's Precious Word.

As the earth is a flat disc, God was obliged to place it on some "foundations" and on "pillars" just like any builder must first fix the foundations before he can build a house. So, as the Greatest Builder that ever lived, God Almighty affirmed in the Bible that he placed the earth upon "foundations." Mr. Pearce is evidently ignorant of these master texts so I proceed here to give a few. And my first quotation comes from his own Biblical authority, Job: "Which shaketh the earth out of her place and the pillars thereof tremble" (9, 6). It would be impossible to "shake" the earth and make its "pillars" tremble unless it was a flat earth. Besides, how could Holy Writ talk of pillars in connection with the earth if there were none? Obviously the earth must stand on pillars because the Bible tells us so.

In I Samuel 2, 8, we get: "The pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them." That's

hitting the heretic straight from the shoulder. It might be argued that this text came from Hannah, and that she wasn't an astronomer like Mr. Pearce. Such an argument would be quite valid, of course, for an ordinary book. But the Bible is not an ordinary book. It is the Word of God, and he must have carefully passed the script for publication, correcting not only printer's errors, but statements of fact. If Hannah therefore said that the world was upon pillars and God passed it, it must be so.

Micah in 6, 2 tells us of "the strong foundations of the earth," and Psalm 104, 5, authoritatively informs us that God "laid the foundations of the earth." So does that eminently readable prophet, Zechariah, in 12, 1—God "layeth the foundations of the earth." By the way, Zechariah, together with Haggai and Habakkuk, are favourite prophets of mine whenever I am introduced to a confirmed Bible reader. I always ask what precisely was their message? I have found it most disconcerting to be introduced so often to profound Bible students who knew literally nothing of such holy men!

In Isaiah 48, 12, 13, God clearly and unequivocally declares "Mine hand hath also laid the foundation of the earth." And there are many similar declarations from the Lord through other prophets. As for the New Testament, we have that great propagandist Peter, the first Pope and Bishop of Rome, who knew Jesus in person and spent his life in trying to reconcile his fellow Jews who believed in only one God with the revelation John gave to the world that there were actually three Gods in one, a problem in arithmetic which no one, except thorough believers like Mr. Pearce, has solved in nearly 2,000 years. What does Peter say? "For this they (the scoffers) are willingly ignorant of that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing (*note here, standing not revolving*) out of the water and in the water." God forbid that I should say that the words "willingly ignorant" used by Mr. Pearce in his letter might have been pinched from Peter. I am sure that very often great minds think alike.

Zeteticists claim that the great mountain barriers over which it used to be impossible to climb were put there by the Lord so that people could not fall over the edge of the earth into the mighty deep. It would be interesting to have their opinion on the way aeroplanes manage to get over the barriers and what they see over the edge.

As Mr. Pearce well knows, the unfortunate Galileo refused to believe God's truth, and told the Holy Roman Church that the world moved round the sun and (God be thanked) had to recant. Of course he muttered that, all the same, it was the earth that moved (round the sun) but the divine Inquisitors did not hear him. In fact, they published a document signed by seven Cardinals that to say the earth moves round the sun "was absurd, philosophically false, and theologically considered equally erroneous in faith." Biblically speaking, they were right and Galileo wrong. And as a famous Zeteticist ("Rectangle") said in his *Zetetic Cosmogony*—"Shall I believe God's truth or man's elaborately got-up inventions? Before belief in the Word of God is quietly yielded to infidel astronomers, let the facts of nature be investigated and the truth of the Bible will soon be apparent."

I know that, as an unrepentant infidel myself, I am heading straight for Hell where I hope one day to find congenial souls; but dare Mr. Pearce run the risk of eternal flames? Dare he risk his immortal soul by believing the infidel yarn of the earth being a globe when we can see it is as flat as a pancake? I hope not.

H. CUTNER.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW—FREETHINKER

IT is most significant and refreshing to find that the last three Prefaces written by G.B.S. show that he was a Freethinker to the end and that he loved tilting at superstition. In the Preface to his scintillating play "Buoyant Billions," he says that he commits it to print within a few weeks of completing his 92nd year, and that as long as he lives he must write. "If I stopped writing I should die for want of something to do."

G.B.S. refers to the Spiritualists as having a cohort of Slate Writers and Writing Mediums "in whose hands a pencil of any sort will, apparently of its own volition, write communications, undreamt-of by the medium, that must, they claim, be supernatural. It is objected to these that they have neither novelty, profundity, literary value nor artistic charm, being well within the capacity of very ordinary mortals, and are therefore dismissed as fraudulent on the ground that it is much more probable that the mediums are pretending and lying than performing miracles." G.B.S. contends that the mediums do not know how to defend themselves, and points out that when he takes his pen or sits down to his typewriter he is as much a medium as Browning's Mr. Sludge or Dunglas Home, or as Job or John of Patmos. G.B.S. does not know how his writings come to him, nor do the Spiritualists, whatsoever their pretences.

In his Preface to "Farfetched Fables," which are really six delightful sketches, G.B.S. says that he has entered his 93rd year, and his fans must not expect more than a few crumbs dropped from the literary loaves he distributed in his prime. Despite this unusual modesty, this Preface is an exceptionally fine piece of writing, and full of wit and wisdom. Here is an extract of special interest to Secularists: "It may seem that between a Roman Catholic who believes devoutly in Confession and a modern freethinking scientist there can be neither sympathy nor co-operation. Yet there is no essential difference between Confession and modern Psychotherapy. The post-Freudian psychoanalyst relieves his patient of the torments of guilt and shame by extracting a confession of their hidden cause. What else does the priest do in the confessional, though the result is called cure by one and absolution by the other? What I, a Freethinker, called the Life Force, my pious neighbours call Divine Providence: in some respects a better name for it. Bread and wine are changed into living tissue by swallowing and digestion. If this is not transubstantiation what *is* transubstantiation? I have described the surprise of a Fabian lecturer on being asked to open a political meeting with a prayer. When I was invited to address the most important Secular Society in England I found that I had to supply the sermon from a ritual of hymns and lessons in all respects like a religious Sunday service, except that the lessons were from Browning and the hymns were aspirations to "join the choir invisible." Later on, when I attended a church service in memory of my wife's sister, and was disposed to be moved by it, the lesson was the chapter from the Bible which describes how the Israelites in captivity were instructed by a deified Jonathan Wild to steal the jewellery of the Egyptians before their flight into the desert. The Leicester Atheists were in fact more pious than the Shropshire Anglicans."

There are many readers who consider that Bernard Shaw is an impractical teacher. I think he was full of realism and common sense. Perpend: "Ask anyone how water tastes, and you will get the reply of Pinero's Baron Croodle "Water is a doglike and revolting beverage," or simply "Water has no taste," or, intelligently, "Water has

no taste for me, because it is always in my mouth." Ask an idle child what it is doing, and it will not claim that it is breathing and circulating its blood: it will say it is doing nothing."

G.B.S. in his Preface to "Shakespeare *versus* Shaw" says that "this in all actuarial probability is my last play and the climax of my eminence, such as it is." And he has something of special interest to say about William Shakespeare. "No year passes without the arrival of a batch of books contending that Shakespeare was somebody else. The argument is always the same. Such early works as 'Venus and Adonis,' 'Lucrece,' and 'Love's Labour Lost,' could not possibly have been written by an illiterate clown and poacher who could hardly write his own name. This is unquestionably true. But the inference that Shakespeare did not write them does not follow. What does follow is that Shakespeare was not an illiterate clown but a well read grammar-schooled son in a family of good middle-class standing, cultured enough to be habitual playgoers and private entertainers of the players. This, on investigation, proves to be exactly what Shakespeare was. His father, John Shakespeare, Gent., was an alderman who demanded a coat of arms which was finally granted. His mother was of equal rank and social pretension. John finally failed commercially, having no doubt let his artistic turn get the better of his mercantile occupation, and leave him unable to afford a university education for William, had he ever wanted to make a professional scholar of him. These circumstances interest me because they are just like my own. They were a considerable cut above those of Bunyan and Cobbett, both great masters of language, who nevertheless could not have written 'Venus and Adonis' nor 'Love's Labour Lost.' One does not forget Bunyan's 'The Latin I Borrow.' Shakespeare's standing was nearer to Ruskin's, whose splendid style owes much more to his mother's insistence on his learning the Bible by heart than to his Oxford degree. So much for the Bacon-Shakespeare and all the other fables founded on that entirely fictitious figure Shaxper or Shagsper the illiterate bumpkin."

I hope that the few quotations I have given will send Freethinkers and Rationalists to these three superb Shaw Prefaces and Plays, issued in one volume by Constable & Co. in their Standard Edition of the *Works of Bernard Shaw* (7s. 6d.). If they are unable to buy the book as a memento, and it will be a thrilling memento of Shaw, they should borrow the book from the public library.

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

ACID DROPS

The howl of dismay that has come from Anglo and Roman Catholics because of the latest pronouncement from the Pope about the way a mother and child *must* be treated by doctors in childbirth, proves that the Pope is still regarded by them as something "apart," something "holy," a "man of God," and that anything he says comes straight from God Almighty. We use the word "dismay" because many of them are trying to explain away what the Pope said and meant. He said that, if it was a question of *one* life to be saved in the case of a difficult birth, the mother must be allowed to die to save that of the child. It was a monstrous pronouncement. But all mothers have the remedy in their hands. Let them refuse to have anything to do, on such occasions, with a Roman Catholic doctor or nurse. These people have to do what the Pope tells them—not what the urgency of the case forces on them. They are dangerous.

That astonishing churchman, Dean Inge, is now at the age of 91, having a tilt at some of the most precious hymns sung so reverently by the pious. What the readers of the London *Evening Standard* will think of his poking fun at the undisguised rubbish still printed in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* we do not know, but fancy telling them that it is time to chuck out perhaps the most popular hymn ever written—"Rock of Agés," though it is true that even Christians have blinked at its conglomeration of mixed metaphors. But we do like the very irreverent ending he gives to Keble's nonsense—"The Moon above, the Church below, a wondrous race they run." The substituted ending is: "But what we all should like to know is which of them has won?" And Dean Inge adds, "Latest betting, three to two on the Moon!"

Reincarnationists will welcome "Diana" who runs the "Fellowship of the Golden Triangle," for she remembers how, only 500,000 years ago, she built—she was a male then—the Temple of Them in Atlantis. And, needless to say, she often returned as a priest in Persia and Egypt thousands of years ago. And now, for some reason the profane can never understand, she is a woman, and can easily get into touch with the spirits of people who lived half a million years ago. But her own original contribution is of outstanding importance. For instance, she insists that the Sun is not a planet at all but "an open doorway to Heaven." That ought to make our ignorant Astronomer Royal sit up!

As for the Moon, it is "a vibrating station for all vibration" and, as Diana has been there, she is in a position to tell us how terrifying is the "intense silence"—and she is never going again. She knows far more about the inhabitants of the other planets—Venus, Mars, Mercury, etc.—than even Swedenborg. Needless to add, you have to pay to belong to the Fellowship for "horoscopes and other readings," and the only enemies are "The Grey Brothers"—intolerance and disbelief. But really, the only point we are curious about is why are so many believers in reincarnation sure that long ago they were princes or high priests? Were they never dustmen?

That gay resort, Bolton, in Lancashire, seems to have defied our powerful instrument for good—The Lord's Day Observance Society, recently. It appears that Mr. Jack Hylton took the "Crazy Gang" there to help him raise funds for the Y.M.C.A. and they actually appeared in *comic costumes on a Sunday*. This must have made the Lord's hair stand on end for, as is well known, even a comic dicky or a red plaster nose is not allowed on any platform on the Lord's Day in England. However, we are glad to say even "Authority" refused to issue the inevitable summons. The show was "under the Deputy Mayor's auspices"—so even the Lord himself was powerless.

Thieves stole £660 from an Elephant and Castle Cinema, but members of the same profession had a bigger haul when they stole jewels worth £51,000 from the Church of the Madonna, near Naples. There seems to be more money in religion than in cinemas. The Churches must come down to purely secular means of protection if they are to escape being burgled. Supernatural defence is worthless, even in Italy. The gods make excellent policemen in savage tribes, but are complete failures in civilised communities. One earthly dog on night duty in a church is worth more than a ton of religious statues or pictures of Jesus.

Under the startling title of "The pious killer of Korea," our American contemporary, *The Saturday Evening Post* relates the redoubtable exploits of a Christian airman in Korea, Dean Elmer Hess. This valiant soldier of the Church militant is, we learn, "one of the deadliest killers of the Korean war," besides being "a devoutly religious man who reads the Bible every night," perhaps we could guess his favourite passages? Moreover, this Christian soldier flying on to war has his aeroplane painted—*per Fidem Volo—By Faith I Fly*. We know from the highest authority, from our Lord Himself, that "Faith can remove mountains," but we may, perhaps, reverently comment that it seems to be taking a hell of a time to move the Chinese out of Korea.

If "the schools" (as the B.B.C. calls them) really understand the intricate theology poured out to them by impassioned professors of Christianity in defence of Jesus, they must be far in advance of the majority of ordinary people. We have been listening to a number of broadcasts by eminent theologians on Jesus Christ, and they would be hard to beat for sheer unverified assumptions. All these professors know exactly what God thinks or does and, without a single dissentient voice, they all earnestly impress the unlucky children who hear them that Jesus Christ was God Almighty, the Creator of the Universe ("he made the stars also") and that if he wasn't, the "unbeliever" was on "the horns of a dilemma." How can he explain the complete belief in everything of the early Christians?

The answer to that one is that it is doubtful whether history has any record of such unmitigated idiots as the early Christians. They believed without the slightest idea of what they believed. Myth and miracle, devils and demons, witches and wizards, spooks and spirits, gods and goblins, were all true. Holy writ or Holy trash or Holy twaddle—all, all was true. One stands aghast at their appalling stupidity—but one can at least find some excuse for them. There is none at all for such people like Dr. Micklem, who is the Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford.

Dr. Micklem quotes the Gospels as "historic" documents, when he knows quite well that they are no more "historic" than the *Arabian Nights*. He knows perfectly well that the Gospels have been riddled by criticism, and to quote Jesus as saying something on the authority of John or Matthew is about the last word in sheer superstition and credulity. If the children in our schools are allowed to hear these talks and are told to believe what they hear, it is simply one of the worst cases of impudent imposition on helpless children that could be cited.

In addition to these school broadcasts, the B.B.C. brought to the microphone two professional theologians to explain to its uneducated listeners—for the others would roar with laughter—"How do I know what I believe?" These two gentlemen insisted that the Resurrection was the best attested fact in history (more authentic than the Coronation of George VI, no doubt) and that Jesus Christ was God Almighty walking among his people in Palestine. That such undiluted bilge could be put on the air is a proof how low the B.B.C. has fallen.

The Pope is still in the news. What we would like to know is, are his faithful medical followers still in practice?

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

S.C.—We are obliged for your information—that G. W. Foote's article on Meredith appeared in the *English Review* in March, 1913.

J. H. PETERS.—Many thanks indeed for your appreciation of "Acid Drops." You will understand that it is quite impossible for us to publish your letter as it stands.

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.

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

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

In the current issue of *The Freethinker* several tributes appear to the late John Seibert. The Editor wishes, herewith to add his own personal tribute. I have known Seibert for some fifteen years and always found him a "live wire," not only in the N.S.S. but, equally, in all movements for social advance and human betterment. In his personal relations, he was always the most generous of men and his own varied experience of cosmopolitan life had given him a broad and sympathetic understanding of all kinds of persons and opinions. His heart was always in *The Freethinker* and in secularism, and his tragically premature death leaves a gap which will not be easy to fill, for his was a dynamic personality and he got a great deal out of life. One can at least be thankful that he was spared the tragic living death of a confirmed invalid, intolerable to a man of his vitality. His many friends will always remember John with affection and respect.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture for the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. in Satis Café, 40, Canon Street, on "What is Civilisation?" The Café is on the ground floor, is central, warm and comfortable, and nearly always well filled. A stream of questions usually follows the lectures, Mr. Rosetti has many friends in Birmingham and there is every reason to anticipate a full house this evening (November 25). Admission is free and the lecture begins at 7 p.m.

Donations for *The Freethinker* Fund, sent direct to the President N.S.S., are quite in order and much appreciated. Mr. Rosetti would like to acknowledge every one personally, but the calls needing his attention are so many and varied that he asks those contributors to take this paragraph as a courteous and grateful recognition of their help in providing the ammunition to keep *The Freethinker* fighting fit. Freethinkers of to-day must not allow their generation to be responsible for letting the paper down.

The Editor of *The Freethinker*, Mr. F. A. Ridley, is having a busy week. On Thursday, November 22, he is lecturing at the East Ham Branch N.S.S. at the Community Centre, Wanstead, at 8 p.m. His subject on this occasion is "English Religion in 1951." Whilst on Sunday, November 25, Mr. Ridley is speaking twice in Nottingham. In the afternoon at 2-30 p.m. at The Technical College, Shakespeare Street, he is addressing the Cosmopolitan Debating Society on "Christianity and

"THE FREETHINKER" FUND

Donations for the week ended Saturday, November 17 1951: A. Hancock, 10s.; W. Morris, £1; Railwaymen's Club & Institute, Swansea, £2 12s.; Robert Spiers, £2; F. W. Harper, £5; Thomas Owen, 10s.; F. McVeigh, £2 4s.; D. Fyfe, 5s.; Fred Muston, 10s.; Anon., £1 0s. 10d.; A. W. Coleman, £10; Dorothy W. Coleman, £5; P. Turner, £1.

Total for week, £31 11s. 10d.

Total received to date, £319 15s. 3d.

Communism." Whilst at 53, Valley Road, Carlton, at 7 p.m., he is addressing the Nottingham Branch N.S.S. on "The Menace of Rome." Mr. F. A. Ridley includes both religion and politics in his repertory and his various addresses will, we are sure, be both informative and provocative of lively discussion.

The West London Branch, N.S.S., to-day (Sunday, November 25), is being addressed by Mr. Adrian Brunel, the founder of the Thomas Paine Society. As his subject is on that great historic figure, Thomas Paine, it should draw a very big audience. There must be few people who know "The Great Commoner" as well as Mr. Brunel, and we are sure his lecture will be intensely interesting.

Mr. Victor E. Neuburg's lecture, "Humbug in Modern Education" delivered last week at the West London Branch of the N.S.S. proved most interesting and provocative. It drew an excellent audience as well as a lively discussion. Mr. Neuburg's father, Victor Neuburg, was a constant contributor to these columns before the war and his profound knowledge of out of the way and curious books is shared by his son. We congratulate him on this success.

THE LATE JOHN SEIBERT A Biographical Note

THIS is not written as an appreciation of John Seibert. Who can write an appreciation of such men, whose moral worth is the backbone of every movement for liberty of thought and conscience? It is written as an indictment of modern civilisation, what we so humorously call "the Free World."

John was born of German parents with a pork butcher's business in Bermondsey. There were four children. The first world war came when John was 9, the shop was raided, the father interned, the mother left to care for her children without the assistance of husband or State. She died soon and the children were placed in a Catholic orphanage, where the goodness of God and the love of the Pope were expounded to them. The father took them back to Germany after the war, to face hunger and unemployment there, but eventually found himself and them employment in the mines. Coal was needed for reparations, so while English miners were standing idle, German miners were working long hours with pitiful wages. John's Catholic father could still thank God, but John joined the Spartacus Youth Movement to fight for the brotherhood of man.

John then returned to England, a lonely lad, but there, in the gloom of the Walworth Road, he found the two sun-rays of his life, his wife, and the National Secular Society. Those were happy days, despite the heckling and the garbage that was thrown at the speakers, and many times the stalwart shoulders of John and his South London colleagues were needed to protect the platform. Even the parson himself would come to do battle with the Atheist. But the happy times passed too soon, and the second world war brought John to gaol as a C.O., because, forsooth, in our free democratic land, the

tribunal could not see that John's whole mind and conscience revolted at organised murder.

Those years of strain passed also, and John sought to learn something of his father and family in Germany. A friend, exiled from Nazism, went on a search through war-devastated Germany to find if any remained. He found the father starving, with hardly a crust to offer the weary traveller, and one brother missing on the Russian front.

John's work continued with the N.S.S. He was elected General Secretary, but even as he attained his dearest wish, he was attacked by his fatal illness, and the eighteen months that followed were just a battle between pain and a mind that refused to capitulate to death. He worked, helped and advised from his bedside to the end.

Goodbye, John, good comrade; may more like you come forward to help the best of causes: the fight for liberty of thought and conscience.

EVA EBURY.

THEATRE

"The Winter's Tale." By William Shakespeare. Phoenix Theatre.

TO know Shakespeare well is to have the benefit of a philosophy of life embellished by the beauty of language. For Shakespeare's language is not just a play on words to sound as pleasant as music; it is full of quotations that have a wisdom which is as valuable to-day as it was in 1616.

But what concerns us now is a play in which King Leontes of Sicily is consumed by jealousy, for he suspects the Queen of intimacy with the King of Bohemia. And so he brings great sorrow on himself by the death of his young son and the loss of the Queen. For many long years he lives as a saddened man, stricken with remorse.

This play is certainly a grim business until we reach the second act. Then, as if the great bard felt the need for light and humorous relief, we are transported to a country called Bohemia but which, to all intents and purposes, as Peter Brook (the producer) would have it, has every appearance of being the Emerald Isle. For all the characters speak with broad Irish accents. A third act takes us back to Sicily and an unexpectedly happy ending.

Generally it is dangerous for a playwright to change from the grave to gay in different acts, and then return again to the serious business of the play, but Shakespeare has done it, and Shaw, in *The Apple Cart*, did something similar when he gave us the Interlude between acts, in which King Magnus spends a few frivolous moments with his mistress. It is true that Shaw's play is of a lighter strain than Shakespeare's, but the idea of humorous relief in liberal measure is there.

John Gielgud gives a masterly performance as the firstly jealous and then remorseful King, making us feel that in spite of his behaviour he is human. Diana Wynyard makes a charming and convincing Queen. Flora Robson plays with great vitality and character the part of Paulina, which could so easily be dull in other hands. In Act II there is quite an outstanding performance by George Rose as Autolycus.

For general standard of production and acting in the leading parts, and because it is Shakespeare, this is a show that deserves to come in front of your list.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

It would not be worth while to live for seventy years if all the wisdom of this world were but folly in the sight of God.—GOETHE.

FIRST-AID TO POETS

THE life-blood of all art, including poetry, is publication. As this country, in rightly seeking to preserve civilisation, has greatly reduced the opportunity for seeing what our artists have to offer, it is not surprising that the publication of English poetry has been almost driven to the wall. The colossal charges for paper and labour that the journals, including our *Freethinker* have to meet is reflected, naturally, in the sphere of book-publishing. I have not room here to dwell on this menace to civilisation, but I am glad to report on the enterprise of one publisher of English verse. The proprietors of The Hand and Flower Press (Aldington, Kent) have issued, for the modest price of one shilling, *Poems in Pamphlet*. These appear monthly, all in the same format, and each pamphlet is devoted to the work of a writer not hitherto, in England, published in book-form. Already owing to the enterprise of this original and beneficent Press, eleven Parnassians see the light of print. Judging from the pamphlet before me, several pamphlets will be bound together in a book, but their thirty or so pages make a most tastefully printed brochure. Bravo! Such originality and enterprise deserves the support of all those to whom culture and free expression mean something. Again, bravo!

The particular pamphlet I have seen (No. X *The Return*) contains 35 lyrics of John O'Hare. When I first saw a poem of his in *The Freethinker* I sat up and took notice. (See this, "Boundary," in the issue of September 23 last). Someone has chosen this distinguished poem to lead-off with in the pamphlet; a judicious choice indeed. The title-poem, "The Return" occupies third place, showing, I should say, last minute alteration.

Mr. O'Hare is a poet to watch. His technique is first-class; he has a marked poetic personality; and his invention rarely flags. Two lines only in these 35 pieces require tightening. As Mr. O'Hare is up to all the tricks, we can only say "Great Homer nods."

From internal evidence I gather that Mr. O'Hare is about middle-aged and was an officer in the last war. Naturally much of his work, as published here, deals with those two linked emotion-movers, Mars and Venus. Proper to the young poet. With the passing of the years we hope to see a greater acquaintance with Minerva. His style is equally well-fitted to that lady's staid charms.

STEPHEN YORK.

IMPORTANT

"Any Questions?" London readers and their friends, especially Christian friends, must make a point of attending at The Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, on Thursday evening, November 29. Questions will be invited from the audience on the subject of "Religion or Secularism?" and will be answered by a panel of speakers consisting of Messrs. F. A. Ridley, Editor of *The Freethinker*; L. Ebury, Vice-President N.S.S. and J. W. Barker, a live wire from the Kingston Branch N.S.S. Mr. R. H. Rosetti, President N.S.S., will be in the chair. We were unable to find two clergymen to join the panel of speakers. It should be a duty to all Freethinkers to attend the session, make it known to friends, and bring as many as possible. Admission is free, and proceedings begin at 7 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE POPE AND DOCTORS

SIR,—The Pope's recent edict concerning Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion, etc., has shocked the vast majority of citizens in most of the countries of the world, and has given rise to articles and letters taking up a great deal of space in the newspapers. Roman Catholics, of course, must submit to his pronouncements, whether they regard them as reasonable or not. The majority of non-Roman Catholics regard his views as anti-social and immoral. Much apprehension has been expressed lest non-Roman Catholics, who may be so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of Roman Catholic doctors, should find themselves forced to submit to treatment dictated by the Pope, in spite of the fact that such treatment is not in accordance with their own conscience. As these views may well involve life or death, this apprehension is not surprising or unreasonable.

But surely the solution of the problem is simple. Let those people, who are willing to submit to the Pope's edict, put themselves in the hands of Roman Catholic doctors, who will carry out the Pope's orders. Persons who are not willing to submit themselves to the Pope's orders should at once make sure that they do not put themselves in the hands of a Roman Catholic doctor. If they are registered under the National Health Insurance scheme with a Roman Catholic doctor, let them transfer at once to a non-Roman Catholic. If they consult a doctor privately, let them make sure, before doing so, that he is not a Roman Catholic. If they are admitted to hospital, let them insist that they shall not be put in the charge of a Roman Catholic doctor.

If this suggestion is carried out, the Roman Catholic doctors will soon feel the breeze. Those of them who persist in trying to subject unwilling patients to the Pope's orders will find their practices dwindling. A large number of Roman Catholic doctors will sing a different tune when they find that obedience to the Pope brings about a serious diminution in the number of their patients.

It is as easy as that.

But this is not enough. Persons who object to the arrogant attempt of the Pope to control the lives and deaths, not only of the members of his own Church, but of other people as well, should take care to vote only for non-Roman Catholics in all Elections, whether Parliamentary or Municipal, and to do their best to see that only non-Roman Catholics are placed in any position of authority which would enable them to impose the Pope's code of behaviour on the public at large.

Nobody would blame Roman Catholics for choosing Roman Catholic doctors or Roman Catholic officials of any kind. They do so already. Let the non-Roman Catholics show *their* preference with the same unanimity.—Yours, etc.,

NORMAN HAIRE.

OUR PARLIAMENT

SIR,—Your readers may be interested as to who's who in the new Parliament.

There are 23 Catholics in the new House of Commons, one more than in the last House. Fifteen of them are Labour, six Conservatives, two Irish Nationals. Thirty-five Catholic candidates were defeated. Labour Catholics represent Chester-le-Street, Gorbals, Thurrock, Essex, Stepney, Sunderland South, Liverpool, Scotland, Shettleston, Wallsend, Bermondsey, Warrington, Nottingham North-West, Ipswich, Bothwell, Wallsall, Edinburgh East.

On a division which affected the Catholic Church, it would be interesting to see if there would be a "United Front."

On the other hand, the "Workers' Charter" is dead against Socialism, or may it not be the old C.P. tactics of peaceful penetration to obtain power? Religion is nothing more or less than a political racket.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. BARKER.

A TRIBUTE

SIR,—May one who no longer ranks with the wholehearted materialists who make up the bulk of readers of *The Freethinker* pay a little tribute to John Seibert? In the days when I was living just outside London, and contributing regularly to your columns, to call at 41, Grays Inn Road, was one of the more pleasing events in my periodic visits to town. And always I found John Seibert friendly and helpful. If there was a book which I thought I could use as a "peg" for a *Freethinker* article, he would always try to get it for me; if I had an idea which I felt might be of use, he would talk about it in his invariably stimulating manner. And—partly through him—I had the pleasure of meeting many interesting people whom otherwise I should never have known. Even though, in the last year or two, I have gradually moved away from the point of view from which John Seibert never wavered, I feel that it is only fair that I should pay this tribute to his memory. I am sure (though I never came across him during his last illness) that it was patiently and bravely borne.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN ROWLAND.

OBITUARY

Arthur Hanson

We have to announce the death of Arthur Hanson of Bingley, Yorkshire, in his 79th year. He was a member of the Parent Society, N.S.S., and well-known locally as a Freethinker, traveller, author, controversialist, and a most likeable character. In announcing his death, the local press took the Christian line of ignoring his Freethought attitude. But worse was to follow. He lived with two elderly sisters who understood there was to be a silent service at the Bradford Crematorium, but evidently some good Christians had got to work and the local vicar turned up complete with his vestments and prepared to read a religious service. Before and after his religious service his action was challenged by Messrs. Baldie and Corina, but there is no shame in Christians when their religion is concerned and no doubt the vicar will pass as a better Christian for his insult over the dead body of a Freethinker.

Arthur Hanson was an educated and honourable citizen, and during his life he was a convinced Atheist; and the Christian vicar had to wait and be content with his dead body.

Our sincere sympathy is with the surviving members of his family.

W.B.

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: E. EBURY and W. G. FRASER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, November 24, 6-30 p.m.; Sunday, November 25, 11 a.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40 Cannon Street).—Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (President, N.S.S.), "What is Civilisation?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Mr. H. L. SEARLE, "Evolution and Genetics."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 27, 7 p.m.: Dr. EUSTACE CHESSEY, "Freedom and Equality."

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre).—Thursday, November 22, 8 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (Editor, *The Freethinker*), "English Religion in 1951."

Glasgow Secular Society (McClellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. MCSHANE, "The Materialist Conception of History."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Miss E. TUCKETT, "India and Politics To-day."

National Secular Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1).—Thursday, November 29, "Any Questions" on "Religion or Secularism." Questions invited from audience and answered by Messrs. F. A. RIDLEY (Editor, *The Freethinker*), L. EBURY (Vice President, N.S.S.) and J. W. BARKER (Kingston Branch, N.S.S.). Chairman R. H. ROSETTI (President, N.S.S.). Admission Free.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (Editor, *The Freethinker*), "Christianity and Communism."

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (53, Valley Road, Carlton).—7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY, "The Menace of Rome."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 25, 11 a.m.: Mr. A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Ideals, Reals, and Shams."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Mr. ADRIAN BRUNEL (Founder of The British Thomas Paine Society), "Thomas Paine."

OUTWORKERS wanted to work at home. Light assembly, Knitting, Envelope Making, etc. Experienced and inexperienced Write: Vocational Advisory Service, Denton, Manchester.

THINKING

IS thinking a malady, an aberration? Most animals, including the human, in order to survive, are obliged to think. Such thinking is not envisaged in the question: nor is the multiple thinking by human beings of multiple matters directed towards practical ends.

The thinking is that into which one may wander, may be led or driven by chance or circumstance; thinking of matters about which only the remotest guesses or no guesses at all can be made.

An early sage poses the rhetorical question whether man, by taking thought, can add a cubit to his stature. Man has, by taking thought, slowly added many cubits to his stature; by taking thought with a view to practical needs or ends. He keeps fumbling and groping and his successes, (in many directions) are amazing.

The famous introvert novelist of the nineteenth century was sitting in his lodgings, staring idly into space. The old servant, who was well aware that his lodging payments were much overdue, brought him up some soup and bread. She asked him what he was doing. He told her that he was thinking. She laid her tray down hurriedly, spilling some of the soup, and broke into unrestrained laughter. Thinking, indeed! With his rent bill mounting higher every day? She obviously believed that he was not engaged in the only sane thinking known to her, and the only thinking permissible to him, namely, how soon he could pay that bill. She represents the type of what the philosophers call the "ordinary consciousness." That description is an euphemistic slant on the "ordinary quasi-consciousness" of the great majority of human beings, rich and poor. To her this lodger's thinking was an aberration, a comic aberration.

If he had been thinking of the next chapter of a novel, and had told her so, she would hardly have considered such thinking as doing something, as working. What the lodger was thinking is not known. Unless men ask for their tablets and set it down, we cannot guess their thoughts.

I stumbled lately into thinking about thinking, by looking, too long, at the tablets of three famous men, Caesar, Boswell and Byron, and finished up by asking whether any of these three men were given to precise thinking in the event, or events, about which the poets speak. What do the poets, who think at large, without hypothesis or assumption, say about such thinking? One says that this world is a place where but to think is to be full of leaden-eyed despair. Another says that men are sometimes sober; that they think by fits and starts, and that when they do think, they fasten their hands upon their hearts. There we have two emphatic answers to the question.

If Caesar, Boswell or Byron ever asked what it was all about, they did not, industrious setters-down though they all were, set it down. It would be easy to go off at a tangent and ask whether setting down is not itself a malady; so much is set down that need not be. None of the three was obliged to write for money, which, according to Samuel Johnson, is the only sane reason for so doing. Byron, indeed, writes: "Why does not Murray send me some ready money? I send him ready poetry." Even poetry takes time: poetry is work and should be a paid occupation.

Had Caesar, Boswell or Byron any time for thinking? All three were men of the world. That is usually a full-time, if not an overtime occupation. None of them reached old age. How did Caesar find time even for setting down

that which he did set down? I am not going to risk a heart-ache by thinking too precisely upon that man's activities. What did that man not do? His magnificent scope sent his murderers to their crime and to their own doom, all of them, together with a host of their fellow-travellers. In comparison with Caesar, Boswell and Byron are busybodies, not busy men.

Sober or not, Boswell sets it down. Style or substance did not worry him. Of his own *Don Juan* Byron writes: "It's bawdy, but it's English." English it certainly is. Thus, by doing, and/or setting it down, without troubling about what is or what was; about what might have been or what may be, even famous men can get along nicely. There is no evidence that Caesar or Byron were subject to frequent fits of melancholy. Boswell when sober, fastens his hands upon the bottle, not upon his heart.

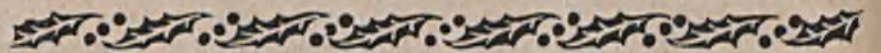
What about the professional thinkers, the philosophers? They have certainly set it down at some length. Do they really think? If thinking gives pain and is, as far as possible, to be avoided, it appears that think they do not. They only rationalise. Two philosophers, an Italian and a German, have described their thinking as idle, if not futile, rationalising; one asks them to drop their assumptions and begin all over again, or hold their tongues.

The Germans have as many philosophers as musicians. Happily, only the latter find listeners. "Fantasierung" is the stamp and mark of German philosophising. Oddly enough, it was left to a German to say this, to set it down. "All your stuff," he says, "is AS IF. You begin by asking us to accept your premises *as if* they were true. Before long you talk *as if* they were indeed true."

Fantasy, therefore, however imposing the jargon which covers it, is not envisaged in the question. The philosophers take the crowded road of escape from thinking, called rationalisation. Along this road with them most of us travel. We prefer pleasant fictions to unpleasant facts. Millions prefer to let others do their rationalising for them. This is the most crowded of all escape routes.

Uncontrolled reverie is our natural, favoured and favourite condition. We wish neither to think nor to rationalise. To take a penny for our thoughts would in most instances be black-market racketeering. It is well, very well, that we do think by fits and starts. Who would or could long undertake thinking too precisely on the events of this world in the last forty years?

J. NEWPORT-KEY.



Seasonal Greetings

We are pleased once again to issue these popular Greeting cards

"Greetings"
in the Spirit of
Freethought
Appropriate
Verses and Design
by P. V. Morris

"The Devil is a
Gentleman"
Design in two colours

"Merry
Krishnas?"
Only a few left

6d. Each Postage 1d.

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

