

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No. 16

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### India—"A Secular State"

IN a recent issue of *The Freethinker* we published the announcement of the Second Congress held by the newly-formed *Indian Rationalist Association* in February. Since which time, we have been fortunate enough to publish an illuminating critique of Indian religion by a distinguished Indian scholar. We make no apology for thus giving considerable space to the intellectual revolution, the first stages of which are, just now, transpiring in the Indian sub-continent; a social and intellectual revolution which embraces and which, if ultimately successful, will transform the lives of one-sixth of the present population of our planet.

We have already in previous issues drawn attention to the remarkable "awakening of Asia" which is already playing, and which appears destined to play in the future so notable a role in the world-affairs of the second half of the 20th century. If we are capable of the intellectual and imaginative effort necessary to transcend the one-sided emphasis on Europe that falsifies so much of our current historical and sociological education, and thus view the world in a more balanced perspective, we must recognise that, for by far the larger portion of the recorded history of human civilisation, the centres of human power and culture have been situated in Asia. To the ancient Babylonians and Chinese, Europe was a barbaric no-man's land and the white savages to the West ranked with the black savages to the South. Indeed, right down to the eve of the Industrial Revolution some two centuries back, the Manchu Empire in China and the Moghul Empire in India probably represented the two most powerful and civilised empires in their contemporary world.

To-day, so short is the human memory, that the above state of things may appear surprising to the average Westerner educated on conventional lines: so effectively has the Industrial Revolution, with its creation of modern military techniques, succeeded in reducing to abject submission the non-European aborigines scornfully lumped together by a modern Imperialist poet as, "the lesser breeds without the law": a designation which would certainly have appeared curious to, say, a mediæval Moor in Spain, then the only civilised land in Europe.

To-day, however, the wheel of evolution is again turning. It is not only possible but probable that the end of another century will see the two greatest Asiatic powers, China and India, again assume the primacy in world-affairs in both the domains of politics and of culture. For which reason, the rise of organised Freethought in these lands and its struggle against the hitherto ubiquitous grip of immemorial superstition is, we submit, a matter of profound concern to all secularists whose attitude transcends a merely parochial outlook.

The pioneer in Asiatic Secularism was Turkey which under the vigorous broom of *The Young Turks* and of their political successor, Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, swept

away the traditional religious regime of the Koran. To-day, however, Secularism is travelling eastward: the two greatest Asiatic nations, India and China, already officially style themselves as *Secular States*. In China, this development forms part of a social and intellectual revolution, the character of which is still largely indeterminate and upon which the contemporary Press seems at present resolved to shed more heat than light! (For example, is Chinese Communism primarily Chinese or Communist?). In any case, the anti-religious campaign in China is organised by a political dictatorship as part of a *social* revolution, for which reason alone it follows very different models from those provided by the evolution of Secularism in the Western World.

In India, contrarily, the form of government at present taken is that of a parliamentary democracy on the Western model. Indeed, the recent General Election in India on the basis of universal adult suffrage, the first of its kind ever to be held in the sub-continent, has been actually described, not without justification, as "the greatest experiment in popular government in human history." India has, to-day, at least in appearance, a very advanced type of social polity, universal suffrage, a socially-minded government headed by an avowed Socialist, and a Constitution which officially recognises India as a *Secular State*. It is all very advanced and democratic, in fact, perhaps too much so, if one considers the appallingly primitive social conditions which India has inherited from her immemorial past of economic backwardness and of crude religious superstition.

Some four hundred million people, the great majority doomed to perpetual poverty, barely consistent with the support of life at the barest subsistence level; hide-bound by a caste system buttressed with obsolete religious taboos which make a *religious* virtue of inequality and human degradation, and which make all social, even sanitary reform virtually impossible, and, on top of all this, a Constitution drawn up by Western-trained intellectuals, in many respects much more modern and up-to-date than is the present Constitution of Great Britain, the cradle of the Industrial Revolution, which still crowns its monarch with mediæval holy oil! A land overrun by sacred cows and administered on the principles of the French Revolution! Such is the gigantic social paradox represented by the priest-ridden *Secular Republic* of India in the year of grace, 1952.

It is precisely this astonishing paradox that both gives its peculiar fascination to India's current social evolution and its special importance to the contemporary advance of secularist freethinking in the Asiatic sub-continent. For in India, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, it is true that no progress of *any* kind can be made without the dissemination and expansion of elementary Rationalist principles. Indeed, this is so, not only in religion and culture but equally in law, politics, and even every-day social life. For, as we observed before in this column, in India for many centuries past, in fact ever

since the downfall of the essentially democratic philosophy of Buddhism, Hindu India has represented a priestly variation of a Nazi *herrenvolk* ("master race") society, in which earthly fortune and social rank are determined exclusively by birth and the purity of the bloodstream, not by the possession of ability, energy, and/or other social attributes. Once a Brahmin, a member of the "twice-born" "master-race," always a Brahmin! Similarly, once an "untouchable," the pariahs, the "Jews" of this racist paradise, always an outcaste!—the word itself is of Hindu derivation.

Moreover, the Brahmins have done what even *Mein Kampf* dared not do openly: they have ascribed a direct *divine* origin to society based on caste to divisions of an ultimately racial derivation, a religious sanction which no ruling-class in Europe, neither French "aristos," Spanish "dons," Prussian "junkers," nor Victorian English "gentlemen" ever dared to do.

Thus, if India is to achieve her social and mental emancipation from the oppressive shackles of an obsolete social order, the attack on her traditional religion and its totalitarian taboos represent the first and decisive line of attack. In contemporary India, Secularism means the salvation of society—Rationalism is the Social Revolution. All power to the gallant band of pioneer Freethinkers who have dared to embark upon this audacious crusade!

F. A. RIDLEY.

## SOME RELIGIOUS ARGUMENTS EXAMINED

### (1) Private Revelation

"YOUR arguments for atheism make no impression on me whatever. You see, I have had personal revelation of God. He has revealed Himself to me. Refute that if you can."

The case is worth dealing with, not for any hope of converting such a person, but for the benefit of any third party who may be present. The function of this type of believer will merely be to serve as a chopping block for the atheist to get his propaganda over to others.

Our opponent here imagines that his "experience" cannot be subjected to argument. From a host of such believers I select Shaw Desmond, who says "there is no arguing with personal experience" (in his book *God*). He later throws great light on the whole situation saying, "We have all got into a muddle about God."

We are told by various Christians that intuition is the surest source of belief (Brown, *Pathways to Certainty*); that the only sure way is to sense God (Horton, *Theism and the Modern Mood*); that in face of such private experience argument is no longer necessary (Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*); and that religious experience is overwhelming data (Dunning, *God and the Absolute*).

Thus we see the God hypothesis driven back on the supposedly unreachable recesses of the human mind, affording a safe harbour from atheist attack. This claim for direct communion through some mystic power sometimes takes the form of lodging such power in the "unconscious." Some hard-pressed advocates of God look eagerly to the psycho-analyst to discover or invent an unexplored element which can tap the realm of Deity.

To those who disclaim any such power the usual reply is that "not all are born with it," and even those who are fortunate enough to possess it must first get in the mood.

Now if this special mystic faculty is a sense, then those who have it should surely be able to perceive with it permanently. It should not come and go. That is not

how senses usually behave. Those who have sight have only to open their eyes to see. Similarly, those who claim to sense God by means of their extra sense should have God on tap as it were.

How to test for this sense remains unanswered. We can discover whether any babe is born with the usual set of senses, but must wait till he has grown up and claims the other for himself. In the meantime, of course, he has been instructed through his normal senses to believe in God. Then, and not before, does he suddenly sprout a religious sense denied to most of his fellows. The atheist may, therefore, be pardoned for thinking that the origin of this special claim is subsequent to instruction through other channels. If children were not told there is a God and were shown the natural causes of things, it would then be possible to see what this special "sense" can do unaided. The Christian who is "converted" by a private revelation is one who has previously been told there is a God. The savage who is "converted" to Christianity has been told by the missionary what to believe.

Apparently God provides this unique opportunity of knowing Him only to those who already acknowledge Him. And if this special faculty is in short supply why does He not put atheists on the priority list? The heavenly Ministry of Supply has here slipped up badly.

This is strange, but stranger still is the fact that some of those who have been convinced that there is a God give up that belief. If a Christian becomes an atheist what is the explanation? A favourite Christian explanation is that just as a man may lose his physical sight so he may lose his spiritual sight.

But a man who becomes blind does not deny that there are things to be seen. He does not say that what he once saw was only an illusion. There is no parallel here to the atheist becoming "spiritually blind." He gives up the belief in God as he gives up that in Santa Claus.

The further argument that the atheist is deliberately lying when he says he does not believe in God, is paltry in the extreme. What possible motive can there be in pretending not to believe in something which has terrible powers of vengeance or reward?

Moreover, the atheist who was formerly a believer is in a position to compare the two states of mind. He understands the believer from the personal experience of having himself once believed. To one who has renounced belief in God, says Prof. de Witt Parker, "a new world dawns. After having lived for some time away from the theistic position one does not look back with regret upon it." (*The Self and Nature*).

The mystic is much mistaken in supposing that he cannot be subjected to argument. He hopes his "experience" is private and unassailable and without material for public investigation. But as such it suffers from the deficiencies of all private interpretations, which, if they are to be relied on, merely end in our cancelling out each other's beliefs, and make chaos of truth. After all, people have been known to complain of a headache when there are sound reasons for suspecting there is nothing the matter. The mystic is as much the subject for psychological inquiry as the lunatic. There is no fundamental difference between the man who eats little and sees God and the man who drinks much and sees pink elephants.

Furthermore, it has been shown that the "sense of a presence" is not peculiar to religion at all. It has been noted, and even induced, in other connections and rationally explained. (See J. H. Leuba, *God or Man?*)

But in no connection apart from religion would "mystic intuition" be accepted as a criterion of reality, as a test of what is fact.

As for the medical treatment of the "mystic," I understand that some at least may have their fancies removed by bromide of potassium.

Finally, I must observe that even if mystic intuition revealed God, as is claimed, it would do precisely nothing to remove the stock objections to the belief in God. It would not relieve God of the responsibility for the cruelty and waste evident in nature, His supposed handiwork. The Creator is not exonerated by new proofs of His existence: the more you prove His existence the more you blacken His character. To be perceived by a mystic sense does not make God any more necessary as "first cause," nor does it excuse His blunders in the role of Evolver. A God who cannot surmount the usual objections is not likely to be rendered more plausible by being mystically apprehended.

G. H. TAYLOR.

### THE KNIGHT OF THE LYCEUM

"Henry Irving." Laurence Irving (Faber and Faber, 50s.) WHAT makes some men actors is at once obvious to the eye and the ear: they *are* actors, unthinkable in any other line of business. This was true of most of the great actors of the past. But now and again an illustrious figure comes into the theatre who does not seem to "belong." Of these Sir Henry Irving was a paramount example. Irving was not naturally histrionic in the manner of Garrick, of Kean, of Barry Sullivan. For years he was an obscure mutterer and rambler on the stage, a man damned with the worst sort of praise. The imperfect voice, with the undisguisable West Country vowels, the lean shanks, the weak eyes, the narrow chest, the undignified gait—what had these to do with romance? Yet this figure with these defects was for three decades the arch-priest of romance, the king of the theatrical world. Why?

The answer can never be complete. It is doubtful if Irving himself knew the complete answer. He was not a man of answers. His grandson, Mr. Laurence Irving, has recently given us a massive book dripping with facts about the theatre's first knight, from the cradle to the grave. Irving's progress from being John Henry Brodribb in a Cornish hamlet, via a clerkdom in the City of London and years of struggle as a billed comedian in the provinces, to the splendour of the Lyceum, the knighthood, and the Abbey, is given in copious detail. But all this copiousness does not explain the man. The book is a history, not a study in character. Perhaps no man can bring his grandfather alive, just as no man can really see his mother. However, Mr. Laurence Irving has accomplished an admirable feat of industry for which we should be grateful.

Irving's people were Puritans for whom the theatre was the gateway of Hell. Irving had a speech impediment, was lanky, unhandsome, rustic, not rich in graces, not deep in philosophy, not at ease in cultivated company. Nearly all of these drawbacks he shed by an intensive adherence to one increasing purpose: to become an actor.

For most of the nineteenth century the English theatre was despicable. Burlesques such as Dickens delighted in, French farces and the crudest melodramas flooded the stage with witless ineptitudes. Acting was at its nadir. Rarely did an actor know much more than his own cues of the play in which he was appearing. The plays of "The Bard" were merely a series of declamations. Actors struck a pose with outflung arm, turned to the audience, and thundered the great lines without reference to the story or the rest of the cast. Little or no attempt was made to

interpret character. Irving changed that. He saw a play as a unity, not as a collection of parts. He brought to the staging of a play every shred of his intelligence. He knew every inflection, every movement, every whisper and gesture he required of each of his company, and drilled his players incessantly until he had made "the two hours traffic of our stage" as perfect in timing and presentation as any human being could. From that night in November, 1871, when he first terrified the Lyceum audience as Mathias in "The Bells," throughout the rest of the century Irving was the undisputed master of production. He brought to the stage not only acting at its interpretative best, but also scenes unparalleled in their splendour. Not for the "Guv'nor" the frugal settings of an austerer day. The great profits he made were spent on magnificent "props." Money had small appeal for him except in so far as it could be used to further his life's pursuit.

Outside the theatre Irving had no obvious life. Everything he saw he saw theatrically. His private life was walled-in, marred by a disastrous marriage made when his heart was with another woman. He had little to say beyond the stage. His letters could have been written by any suburban strap-hanger, down to the last dash and commonplace remark.

Not every critic regarded Irving favourably, even at the height of his reputation. There was in particular a rufous man from *The Saturday Review* whose funeral expenses Irving said he would cheerfully pay. But Shaw's denigration was legitimate. He recognised Irving's consummate acting skill, but he deplored Irving's using that skill on tawdry rôles when the New Drama was clamouring for worthy exponents. This was a true charge. Irving squandered so much of his genius on playwriting cheapjacks, on glutinous concoctions with not a glimmer of intellect in them. He was blind to Ibsen—a mortal sin in Shaw's eyes. Yet Irving had, willy-nilly, paved the way for Shaw's own theatre. He was the bridge between the old rumbustious posturing that had passed for acting and the intelligent interpretation on the stage of genuine social problems.

Throughout his major career Irving had the inestimable partnership of Ellen Terry—the woman who received sonnets from Wilde, letters from Shaw, and adoration from all men. Her possession by Irving was another of Shaw's grouses: he saw the incomparable Nell being wasted in trivialities, and above all things Shaw detested waste.

Irving was faithful to his friends, of whom Bram Stoker, his business manager and the author of "Dracula" was one. His purse was trash where they were concerned. He conquered America with Shylock and Hamlet, and made his "Bells" there as haunting as Edgar Allan Poe's. At home, the most famous were pleased to welcome him. Gladstone was a frequent visitor back-stage, and once inadvertently appeared in a crowd scene and was recognised by the audience. Victoria and the future King of England were happy to see him. But with all this Irving remained an aloof figure, curiously alone, strangely unreal, always playing a part.

He died an actor's death. He was dying on the stage, but the play was the thing. He held death off until the final curtain, struggled to his Bradford Hotel, and there made the grand exit. His ashes are in the Abbey, next to David Garrick's. His effigy in stone is a London landmark. His memory endures splendidly in the history of the English stage. He was a great actor.

JOHN O'HARE.

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

### ACID DROPS

Some photographs published the other week in the *Sunday Dispatch* and, of course, called "amazing," showed a Spiritualistic medium "levitating," and another, a small table dancing about in the air. Unfortunately, the first one looks suspiciously like the medium jumping up when the snap was taken, and the table leg appears quite clearly to be held by the medium; or, to put it another way, if the photographs are not fakes, we would be prepared to eat any old hat. We can only repeat again that all "spirit" photographs are *frauds* of the worst kind. Levitations are just as much myths as the Indian Rope Trick.

Every now and then our religious mentors, anxious to give advice to erring man in our national journals, tell us that we should be "perfect even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." One wonders sometimes whether bigger twaddle was ever uttered before or since. What in Heaven's name does this marvellous teaching of Jesus mean? What does "perfect" mean? Does it mean that our Father which is in Heaven never loses his temper, never kicks the Mother of God about, never smokes or has a drink or goes to a theatre? In any case, if there is a God who is perfect, how in the world can a mere man, a worm in the sight of the Lord, reach such perfection? The more one reads this kind of rubbish, the more one wonders why man is so easily deluded.

At last the "unco guid" in Greenock have scored a devastating victory. For years they have protested against the awful desecration of the Sabbath Day which the Sunday opening of cinemas has caused, and at long last, the magistrates have succumbed and God help any cinema now if it is kept open on a Sunday. The magistrates have complete power in Scotland and no referendum can alter their decisions. It should be added that, though the police have found that the way young people have been kept off the streets on a Sunday evening through the cinemas being open meant far less crime, the magistrates are adamant. An increase in crime is of far less consequence than desecrating the Sabbath Day. But will the citizens of Greenock take it all lying down?

We recently noticed that a lady, Mrs. Mills, Principal of the Ancient Mystical School of Memphis, Chelsea, gave a lecture on the "Trinity Mystery." Of course, in the "ancient mysteries" the Trinity played an important part, and the "vulgar," that is, the simple dupes who believed in these mysteries, were ready to swallow any mysterious nonsense. The best definition we know of a Trinity was given to us by a vicar—a simple cup of tea. This is made up of three parts, tea, sugar and milk, which three make one—one cup of tea. If you can swallow this, there is no occasion to bother with ancient mysteries.

According to Canon Alexander of Gloucester, England is still a pagan country, and the Church of England has still the long task of the conversion of the English people to Christianity. Apart from this amazing confession of failure, does the worthy Canon think it will succeed—now? Does he really believe that the ancient Oriental myths and legends which comprise Christianity will ever again be believed?

There is still plenty of money in the Bible. An expensively produced folder was pushed into our letter box the other day imploring us to enrol for a free Bible

course which would solve all our problems. In the sacred pages of God's Holy Book is every answer necessary for our complete happiness and, by enrolling, we can have entirely free a magnificent course on Bible Prophecy—the Holy Way in which God Almighty reveals the Future.

We wonder who pays for all this? So anxious are the people behind the "Voice of Prophecy" to rope you in that even prepaid postage is offered. And when you pass the course of instruction you get a "beautiful Certificate." It is a tragedy of course that money should be wasted on these idiotic Oriental myths—but does it not prove all the more the necessity of such a journal as *The Freethinker*?

### THEATRE

"Nightmare Abbey." By Thomas Love Peacock. Dramatisation by Anthony Sharp. Westminster Theatre. WRITTEN in 1818 as a novel, the dramatic qualities of *Nightmare Abbey* have remained undiscovered until Anthony Sharp tackled the task of making it into a play. His effort has proved highly successful, so that one wonders how it could have remained dormant for so long.

All the characters in the play are good theatrical matter and give excellent parts to the actors, who make all they can of them. Gerald Cross's aged butler, Raven, is a study in what can be done with creaky, shaky knees. Charles Lloyd Pack as the Widower Glowry is very good, in spite of his habit of addressing the audience instead of the character to whom he speaks. Alan MacNaughtan gives a very fine performance as young Scythrop Glowry, who cannot make up his mind with whom he is in love. Geoffrey Dunn gives a charming interpretation of Mr. Listless, who cannot be bothered to lift an arm to ring a bell. Even love-making is just too exhausting. Richard Warner was convincing as a rather boring transcendental philosopher. Marcel Poncin made the most of a small part as valet to Listless. Valerie Hanson gives an intelligent and spirited performance as Marionetta. Anne Trego plays Stella with the necessary quiet and calm.

But the play and all these good performances would not stand out as such a fine piece of work without the very capable direction of John Fernald. We may safely visit the Westminster Theatre assured that we shall have just value.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

### REFLECTIONS ON TRANSLATING ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

I have rubbed shoulders with immortal men,  
Translating Pushkin into Shakespeare's tongue;  
One died in middle-age, the other young,  
This hyphen wields an ageing, shaky pen.  
But something of their glory him inspires,  
And raises one unknown and all too weak;  
Sometimes I feel that I their accents speak,  
My syrinx echoing Homeric lyres.  
Doubtless this is but a delusion fond,  
Proceeding from a poet's vanity;  
Yet to consort with godlike sanity  
May set one free from littleness's bond.  
Howe'er that be, when hearing Pushkin speak,  
His thought I share and am no longer meek.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

Without liberty, what union would there exist among men? They would be united as the horse is united to his rider—as the whip of the master is to the skin of the slave.—*Lamennais*.

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s.; half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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.

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

## SUGAR PLUM

London Secularist speakers regularly carry the Free-thought message out to the provinces, but on April 20 the process will be reversed when Mr. T. M. Mosley, of Nottingham, visits the West London Branch N.S.S. to lecture on "Freethought, Freewill and Determinism." London Freethinkers and their friends ought to turn up at the "Laurie Arms," Crawford Street (off Edgware Road) at 7-15 p.m., in force to hear this lively and likeable exponent of a secular philosophy.

## ON QUOTING AND MISQUOTING

SOME time ago, I was introduced to somebody who immediately asked me whether it was I who was always "misquoting" people in *The Freethinker*. Note the "always," and note also that when I asked him to give, say, a dozen examples of my "misquotations"—he hedged. He could not, of course, remember them. The fact is, it is very difficult to catch up with a deliberate lie or libel, and more particularly if it is a Christian lie. Everybody knows that a good, thumping, Christian lie can rarely be caught up.

I recently had two discussions—one with an anti-Evolutionist parson who had the impudence to charge me with misquoting Genesis when in reality it was he who had misquoted; and the other with Dr. Paul Tabori who also had the impudence to say I had misquoted him when in reality I had used his "exact" words. Neither apologised, of course. But right here, it might as well be made clear what I mean when I use the word "exact."

If I make a point of quoting some writer, say, like Dr. Tabori, and I put my quotation between inverted commas, I claim to have quoted him *exactly* unless I have deliberately, or otherwise, made a mistake. No one is infallible, and I have always tried to be fair to an opponent, and have done my utmost to quote correctly. But when it comes to the Bible I am, in fact we all are, in a quandary. Over and over again I have, in discussions with opponents, quoted the "exact" words of Jesus and have found it most amusing to watch the reactions of my opponents.

On one occasion, I pointed out that Jesus asked us to "hate" our parents to be his disciple. This was most indignantly denied. I was able to show the text in my Bible—and was immediately told that it may be in the A.V., but no "scholar" uses the A.V. these days but the R.V. I then showed it was in the R.V., and was told that, after all, the R.V. was obliged to follow the A.V. in most

cases. I ought to go to Weymouth or Moffatt or Young; and when I showed it was "hate" in Moffatt and Young, I was told that in any case Jesus did not speak either English or Greek and the "ignorant" disciples had got it all wrong. There was also another explanation—when Jesus uses the word "hate," he never means hate. He means "love."

This little incident came into my mind when I read Mr. A. Robertson's indignant letter in protest to my criticism of his article in the *Rationalist Annual*. Through the kindness of Mr. A. E. Carpenter, whose humorous verse is so greatly appreciated in these columns, I was given the date of Mr. Robertson's article in this journal—September 20, 1942, and nobody could have written more clearly than he has done. It proves exactly what I said—that, for him, one of the best, if not *the* best, proof of the historical existence of Jesus Christ is the prophecy of the Second Coming. For, as he pointed out, it is difficult to imagine anybody putting into the mouth of a myth a prophecy which did not come off. Therefore the prophecy was actually uttered and therefore there must have been a Jesus Christ. Mr. Robertson used this argument for years in articles and books and lectures. Not only that—he gave *exact* references to the Gospels.

But Mr. Robertson always took good care to leave a passage for his escape if that were necessary. That the prophecies relating to the Second Coming proved the existence of Jesus Christ as a Man was undeniable—there they were, and as Mr. Howell Smith, bravely following him, said, "The strong witness of these texts has to be explained away by the Mythicists." But—there is always a "but" in the path of the escape—neither Mr. Robertson nor Mr. Howell Smith is prepared to say that it really was *Jesus* who uttered the prophecy. It—the prophecy—is a "strong witness," perhaps the strongest of all proofs that there really was a Jesus, but "If Jesus never uttered the words in question someone who lived very near the time to which tradition assigns him invented them for him," adds Mr. Howell Smith. What an astounding proof for a real Jesus, therefore, the "invention" of a prophecy for him "near the time"! "Invention" is a euphemism for downright fraud and forgery, and in this Mr. Robertson heartily follows (or thinks the same as) Mr. Howell Smith. In his article in *The Freethinker*, after pointing out how he had always upheld the texts of the Second Coming prophecies "exact" references to which he gives in proof of a real Jesus, calmly adds, "I have nowhere assumed that the saying is an authentic prophecy of Jesus." I should think not indeed. For sheer unmitigated rubbish this would be hard to beat. If the prophecies are not "authentic," that is, if they have been deliberately invented, as Mr. Howell Smith suggests, then obviously they are part and parcel of an impudent fraud, and no more prove the existence of Jesus than they prove the existence of green cheese on the other side of the moon.

No wonder Mr. Robertson is now trying to get out of his supremely silly argument by offering £10 if I can show that he ever said that the prophecies "came from Jesus exactly as described." All he has to say is that he never said Jesus said them though he gave the exact references to the Gospels. All he need say also is that Jesus never said what he is described as saying in the A.V. because Jesus never spoke Bible English. And he could add, for that matter no one knows what Jesus said, for no one, as far as we know, ever took down his marvellous prophecies in the language he said them; we do not even now what that language was for certain. So why he limited his offer to £10 instead of £1,000 or £1,000,000 is beyond me. He would have been quite safe to offer anything for, if he

"nowhere assumed that the saying is an authentic prophecy of Jesus" after giving exact references, he has smashed his own argument to pieces.

I was therefore quite right when I showed that he had given up the prophecy argument, and was now desperately trying to find somebody, anybody, who died—never mind whether he was or was not crucified—somebody who was put to death for something, no matter when, or where, or even by whom, so long as it is somewhere near the traditional date of the supposed death of Jesus. Anything, anywhere, any time, but for Christ's sake, leave me something on which the "legend" (Mr. Robertson's own word) of a Jesus of Nazareth can be hung.

For myself I have never pretended that, in attacking the myth of Jesus, I was obliged to hunt round for a "martyr," a quite unknown person about whom history has left no traces. I have always contended that the Jesus Christ of the four Gospels, or Jesus of Nazareth, as our very reverent Rationalists like to call him, never lived. I say he was a myth like Osiris or Jupiter. And I am not in the least interested in discussing the many unknown martyrs, monks, or revolutionaries who, according to Mr. A. Robertson, may all have been the real Jesus, that is, the Jesus of Nazareth he still contends for—if he now does.

H. CUTNER.

### TRAVELLING PARSON

(Concluded from page 120)

"Unless—" I hesitated suggestively.

"Unless what?"

"The State or the community takes sudden or decisive action."

"How?"

"As in Russia and other countries of like mind, Mexico, Turkey and several more where religion has been toppled from its eminence."

"It's not pre-eminent anywhere."

"Would you say that of Spain or Portugal, Quebec or Ireland?"

"Yes. Even there the Roman Church does not dominate as it did in mediæval days. I notice in Ireland, that pet child of the Pope, a tendency toward the bureaucratic State, governmental control of everything, which means inevitably, secularism, however much the priests resist."

"It's world-wide."

"Oh, yes. Examine India, once the breeding ground and hotbed of religions. Rapidly it's becoming secularised as it establishes its native politics and social institutions now the English have withdrawn. And what entry will Christianity have into the new China?"

"Very little. The coloured races are determined to throw off the white man's yoke, and they'll classify his religions as part of the burden to be dropped."

"They surely will."

"Perhaps an all-black Africa, which will come, signs of the movement toward it are growing, will also reject white religions."

"More than likely."

The parson remained gazing at me absently, more, as it were, past me, lost in contemplation. He had an ugly irregular face, nothing attractive about it. Better it looked now with the peevish, half-shy, half-defiant expression gone which had been there when I first looked at him on entering the compartment.

It was not a strong face. The mouth was nervous and the eyes troubled, strained by worrying.

Their glance came back to meet mine. More at ease

than he had hitherto spoken, the man said: "It has been a pleasure to be able to speak freely."

"That I've done. You must have gathered I've no love for religion or its professors."

"You've been honest about it, without superiority or contempt or silent aversion, from all of which I've suffered."

"Nonetheless you must have had sympathisers."

Whereat the clergyman laughed before saying, "Some clever Frenchman is reported to have prayed: Save me from my friends and I'll save myself from my enemies."

"And you agree with him."

"Unfortunately my experiences largely make me. Pious laymen and well-meaning ladies and devout spinsters can all be trials."

"You should suffer them happily—or meekly—as Christian example."

"I can't exactly agree with Saint Paul: Ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. Perhaps I'm not wise."

"It sounds to me as if Saint Paul writ sarcastic."

"Beyond doubt. But to find wit or humour in the Bible is unpopular with my cloth, especially among those in authority over us."

"Who have preferments to offer?"

"Aye."

I ventured, "Evidently you've struck a bad patch some time in your life?"

He answered with simple candour: "I suppose I should never have been a clergyman, but I'm too old now for any lay job, useful or otherwise. I've spent my professional life in town curacies till it had grown unbearable."

"So what now?"

The train was slowing for stopping at a wayside station with a squat-towered church visible among trees.

The parson explained, "I'm taking over a tiny country parish which apparently no one else wants."

He rose to his feet and pulled a large suitcase off the rack, saying, "I may find peace of mind, or at least fresh interests, both of which I've lost if not my faith."

"The country may restore the first two, less likely the last."

Shaking his head regretfully, the cleric said good-bye and alighted from the train.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

### BOCCACCIO TURNED SAINT

LOVE-CHILDREN are usually precocious, as was Boccaccio, born in Paris, 1313, and when only seven years old, often amused adults with wonderful stories of his own invention.

This romantic faculty was due to an illicit love affair between his father and a French lady, Boccaccio's unmarried mother, whose boy became Italy's famous author of the renowned *Decameron*.

At the age of 28, Boccaccio was madly in love with King Robert's natural daughter, whose passions re-inspired him, "to set his heart aflame," and for this fair mistress, he composed his *Filocolo*, a love romance, similar to the *Seven Wise Masters*, from Arabia.

His Court experiences afforded ready material for two poetical productions, *Amorosa Fiammetta* and *Amorosa Visione*, but his masterpiece, *Decameron*, originated with an ardent desire to amuse Queen Joanna of Naples.

The *Decameron* was written when the plague desolated Italy; and, the preface says: "From my youth, I have

been inflamed by consuming love, that caused me much trouble and suffering, and which no fear, shame nor advice could lessen, and I still love, though no longer a victim of uncontrollable passions." He declares that his *Decameron* rather belongs to women than to men, because fearfully and with shame, women conceal within their tender hearts that flame which burns the fiercer because hidden. Hence, he wrote for the amusement of gentle ladies in love, one hundred stories narrated by seven ladies and three cavaliers, assembled at a villa, during the pestilence.

Critics agree that the *Decameron* is a work of genius, but the author's mind was tarnished by the profligacy at the Court of Naples, and the licentious manners of that age. Boccaccio ridiculed the priests to such an excess that the Holy Fathers not only preached against the *Decameron*, but ordered all copies of it to be brought to the Piazza de Signori and a bonfire made of them as an *auto-da-fé*. This act-of-faith is the reason why early editions are now very scarce, and the few copies remaining are literary treasures sought at high prices. The *Decameron* was also placed on the *Index* as a book forbidden to Catholics. Boccaccio's next piece of writing was the *Corbaccio*, in which he vilifies a beautiful young widow whom he loved, but she scorned and derided him.

The style and tone of *Corbaccio* forbid all decent-minded persons reading it. In the year 1361, when Boccaccio was 48, there came a climax. A Carthusian monk arrived at Certaldo and demanded an immediate interview with Boccaccio. The monk declared that he had a revelation and divine mission to save Boccaccio from perdition, because the *Decameron* and his other writings were causing widespread evils; and, unless the author repented and cast aside profane studies, his fate would be eternal punishment, as depicted for the wicked in Dante's *Inferno*.

The monk added: "If you refuse to obey, I predict your miserable end and a speedy death." He then departed, leaving Boccaccio in such a state of superstitious fear which shook him from head to foot.

Boccaccio sought Petrarch's advice who replied by letter saying, "Falsehood and imposture are often disguised by a monk's cowl. Do not look with terror on what ought really to be a matter of rejoicing. To meditate on death is to aspire to that height where no temptation intrudes to assail or contaminate. Do not abandon your books and learning, which nauseate the weak but which invigorate the strong and comfort the mind."

What really seared Boccaccio's conscience was the monk's knowledge of certain acts during the author's life, and which Boccaccio presumed were secret. Thus, the hooded monk was victorious and his victim turned pious when frightened.

A papal "bull" was speedily procured and by its dispensation Boccaccio's illegitimate birth was annulled and, forthwith, he wrote a religious treatise on mythological gods, by rattling dry bones of a dead language. Instead of using his vigorous style of poetic Italian, which forsook Boccaccio when he turned Saint.

Wm. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**HAVE WE "HAD IT" ?**

SIR.—Mr. Raymond McKeown usually finds that people who scoff and sneer at Christianity know precious little about it, and what is more, don't want to know anything about it. I, myself, usually find that people who scoff and sneer at Atheism know precious little about it, and, what is more, don't want to know

anything about it. Sensible people, however, never conclude that sneers are the best to be said by either side and they are provoked to inquiry rather than to resentment.

The famous unbelievers of history knew their Bibles through and through; this was their business, nor could the Christian Citadel be evaded, let their modern disciples follow them who can. An Atheist, I'll warrant, devotes more time to the Gods and their attributes than does a host of believers. Again, this is his business. During the period of his Agnosticism, Mr. McKeown evidently failed to discover that amongst unbelievers there exist standards of thoroughness and integrity equal, at least, to any within the opposing camp.

During a lecture, Charles Bradlaugh was once taunted in the manner of tradition. What could an unbeliever offer to a poor old invalid? After the lecture Bradlaugh called upon the invalid and with words of cheer, gave her a sovereign. Whom God had abandoned, Bradlaugh aided. What message would Mr. McKeown convey to a Jewish invalid? Could he better the example of Charles Bradlaugh? Unbelievers are not the helpless fools of Christian tradition.

Your critic knows from daily experience that "He is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Not want for what? Does he mean that no sincere Christian ever died of a broken heart? A carpet of grass covers over such tragedies of the past and the preachers continue to magnify the power of the Word and of prayer.

What nonsense to disqualify *The Freethinker* from extending sympathy to the suffering, to the misfortunes and the follies of personal and communal life. These are the very foundations of its being, and of the grave and wider counter-charge. After centuries of thinking and guidance on traditional lines there are serious misgivings abroad regarding the survival of civilisation itself.—Yours, etc.,

J. G. BURDON.

**OBITUARY**

**WILLIAM FAWTHROP and THOMAS SUTCLIFFE**

Freethought and Secularism in Bradford have lost two stalwart champions by the deaths of the above.

On April 3 the remains of William Fawthrop, who brought to the humanitarian ideals of Secularism, the clarity of vision of Atheism, and the appreciation of an accomplished musician, were committed to the flames at Scholemoor Crematorium. 75 years of age, he is mourned by a widow, five sons, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, together with a wide circle of friends and admirers, including all local members of the N.S.S. and the Freethought Society.

Two days later at the same crematorium, Thomas Sutcliffe, 73 years of age, and a founder member of the existing Bradford Branch of the N.S.S., was the recipient of a similarly affectionate and respectful farewell. A sincere Socialist, Co-operator and opponent of war, he was above all a Freethinker. A lifelong bachelor, he lived with his niece, whose loss of a virtual father ensures her of the sympathy of all our readers.

In both cases the families asked Messrs. H. Day and F. J. Corina to give secular addresses at the funerals. An indisposition prevented Mr. Day's attendance, but Mr. Corina officiated in a manner that was much appreciated by the relatives and others present.

P. V. M.

**LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.**

**OUTDOOR**

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: FRANK ROTHWELL, A Lecture.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.
- 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: J. M. ALEXANDER.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

**INDOOR**

- South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "H. G. Wells: A Revaluation."
- West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "Freethought, Freewill and Determinism."

### DYNAMIC FOR FREETHINKERS

ONE of the chief reasons why people can be led into the insanity of war is that people are bored. They are so depressed by the routine which they're told they must accept, they are ready for suicide and murder to break the monotony. It pays a government, supporting itself on the gangsterism of power politics, to keep the bulk of the population bored. Equally, the rule by boredom is welcomed by the churches. A bored population is apt to accept, out of its very boredom, the myths of religion as well as the myths of war. A chance of better things in the sky makes many a frustrated citizen pay lip service to Christianity.

The church and the war-mongers have long been fellow conspirators.

In return for the benefits to the church of boredom in peacetime, the clergy rally to the power politicians in time of war. Indeed, I've long held that the manufacturers ought to make tin clergymen instead of tin soldiers as the parsons seem so ardent. Even in peacetime they prop the bloody banners of regiments in their churches.

Superstition supports superstition—religion and war go hand in hand.

Of course the church tries to rationalise its position. It speaks of the marvellous character-building qualities of war, glossing over the history of men who learn to kill, rape and pillage. I suppose it might be "character building" to fire off a few rounds of a machine-gun into a children's playground. It would teach the kids to be brave and strong and pick up their wounded. Yet, like war itself, it would build the character of war-mindedness; although little ones might turn to God in their extremity.

"Ah," chant the self-justifying parsons, "what could be more uplifting than the thought of the soldier who gives his life to his country!" But to the clear mind the good soldier does nothing of the kind: he *sells* his life for as many enemy lives as he can take in exchange. It is all part of the sordid merchandise on the market of power politics.

And men fall for it because they are bored, kept bored by those who know how to exploit men; and the church encourages the massacres for the sake of the boredom in between which mightily profits the church.

So it is imperative that people should learn that the most adult thing one can do is—to take up the *burden* of being happy.

Burden? Yes, being happy means being grown-up. For happiness, in this profounder sense, does not mean just gaiety. Happiness, if it is to have permanent foundation, must take into account the tragedies of life. Adult happiness is a way of accepting the inevitability of the human lot without being hag-ridden by mortality.

Happiness gives man his sanction to think that "he matters." Ants have soldiers, the mantis tribe are priests, and bees have scientists, and peacocks professional beauties. But only man can formulate the philosophy of happiness, obscured as it has been by the wiles of the church and the state.

Happiness means, among other things, being intellectually alive, the foe of every superstition. It means being really courageous (not bloody minded) so that everything which befalls is turned into an adventure of the mind. It means constant rethinking, and knowing that cowardice is to accept any sort of martyrdom rather than think.

Here, then, is a dynamic for freethinkers.

To expose the myths of religion is a fine and urgent work; yet there is more work to be done unless the rationalist movement is to atrophy.

Freethinkers should make a special study of happiness—sexual fulfilment, occupation interest (adapting work to man and not man to work), birth control (an essential of economic happiness), and the delight of new horizons which can be the gift of the arts, etc. Freethinkers should form groups to undertake an analysis of all aspects of happiness; for thought can never be free so long as it is the thought of bored men.

Happiness is the most wonderful of all disciplines—try it and see!—as well as the answer to priests and war-mongers. Personal happiness now! That should be the freethinker's slogan. For it should be the positive work of freethinkers to lay the foundations of a civilisation which is built on the beauty of personal enjoyment and not on the "truth" of myth and statistics.

The one worthy heritage which we can give our children is to show them happiness. We must not shift the burden of adulthood to subsequent generations. We must show our children an accomplished wisdom—otherwise we have no right to face them. If we teach them in order to be taught by them, we might as well straightaway resign our right to exist.

Church and state meet to outlaw the subject of happiness now: it is for freethinkers to defy the tabus and show the positive way. To relieve world unhappiness, to have a world worthy of freethought, we must ourselves be the solution.

A happy world will have no need for religion and war because—we will all be freethinkers!

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

### SURPLICES AND DUNGAREES

The "Butler Budget" left me depressed  
Eighteen pence on my food, and—

Well, you know the rest.

But that wretched depression

Has now passed away,

As I read in our newspaper to-day

"Surplices will be cheaper"!!

These old dungarees—worn every day

Will now cost me more,

So my newspapers say.

How *can* I complain, now that I know

"Surplices will be cheaper"!!

Dungarees and Surplices, let it be said.

Show how the wearer gets his daily bread.

The Surplice is donned

One day in seven,

Whilst its wearer advises

The Best Route to Heaven.

A mean sort of job, so I guess that's why

"Surplices will be cheaper"!!

Members of Parliament pray every day

For God's guidance and wisdom—

So they say.

To the Nation's business

They seriously bend,

And finish with this Gilbertian end—

"Surplices will be cheaper"!!

When the Hierarchy meet again

In solemn Convocation,

They should urge the Pious Butler

To amend his legislation

"Ermine and Lawn prices,

Growing ever steeper."

Will not console them over much, tho'

"Nighties may be cheaper"!!

G. O. LEARY.