

# The Freethinker

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THERE are many things that irritate me in this Brave New World of ours. Doubtless the fault is mine. I am getting old and crotchety. But I feel that I can make out a fair case for some of my resentments, and, after all, there are millions of folk who share them. The one I have in mind at the moment is the popularity of the phrase "spiritual realities," and the suggestion that any man who uses it fluently and reverently, especially if he is a statesman, editor or radio-speaker, bears the hall-mark of respectability; like wearing a top hat and striped trousers. There is no doubt about his sincerity, for he is prepared to die, or send someone to die, for his belief, and it permits him to associate, rather incongruously, with bishops.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

**Spiritual Realities  
and the Top Hat**

—By JOSEPH McCABE—

Now, for the last 55 years the word spiritual has had the same uncomfortable effect upon me as the mention of castor oil, and I burned my last top hat and striped trousers during the First Great War. One of the oracles of the *Literary Guide* explained, some time ago, that this is because my type of mind is incapable of understanding the subtleties of philosophy. Maybe; but I find myself in good company. Nine-tenths of the ancient Greek thinkers, who are credited with some degree of subtlety, shared the feeling. So the highest authority on them, Zeller, assures us. They thought that Pythagoras, who introduced the idea from the East, was just an importer of novelties, and they almost called Plato, as Augustine did, "an old fool."

They had a story that one day, when Plato had discoursed to his pupils for an hour on this beautiful idea of the immortal soul, he looked up (or down) and noticed that there was only one pupil left in the room, and this bold youth, Aristotle, did not believe a word of it. Even Aristotle never believed in spirit. His greatest blunder was that he deserted the fine materialistic tradition of Greek philosophy and so stumbled into a belief in non-material "forms" and "psychics," but he buried Plato's idea of a beautiful butterfly in a cage of clay with him. And the Greeks buried Aristotle's idea of things that were immaterial but not spiritual with him. The philosophy that ruled the Greek-Roman world in the next four constructive centuries was a blend of the sanest ideas of the Stoics with those of the Epicureans, and to both Zeno and Epicurus the idea of spirit was an irritating bit of verbiage.

Quite possibly our statesmen and editors—some of them look as if they knew a lot more about spirituous than spiritual matters—never heard of all this, and the profound young men who tell us how superficial materialism is may say that modern science and philosophy have altered all that. I am not very clear about philosophy, if the philosophers themselves are, on this point. I once asked Thomas Whittaker, who was for many years the philosopher of the R.P.A., if he believed in the immortality of the soul. He reflected for a moment, and then said slowly: "I don't know." Some years ago, the American Philosophical Association asked 34 of its leading men, selected by vote, to give lengthy summaries of their views, including

their views on religion, in a large work with the title "Contemporary American Philosophers." No less than 29 of them never mention "mind," much less "soul." Only two of them believe in a spiritual and immortal mind, and these are professors in a Wesleyan college.

Our own ablest philosopher, Bertrand Russell, tells us that William James, who had so much influence on American thought, described mind as "a faint rumour left behind by the disappearing soul upon the air of philosophy." For his own part, Russell says that modern science has "made mind less mental, and matter less material," and we might as well leave it at that. A very neat formula, and I greatly

admire it and don't accept it. Science has made no discoveries about matter that disturb materialism, as we materialists always defined it, and as to mind, it has scotched the ghost altogether.

My worst vice is a mania for facts. Probably my mother was bitten by a hornet when she was bearing me. However, that may be, I, a couple of years ago, in my mania for exact information, examined the forty manuals of psychology that had been published in America, the Mecca of that science, during the previous twenty years. Some of them were symposia, so they represented the views of about fifty of the more important professors of "the science of mind." Not one of them believed in the existence of a mind of such independent reality that it might be conceived as surviving the death of the brain, and that is the only point that is worth fighting about. Half of them never mentioned the word "mind," and the majority of the remainder explain that it is just a convenient name for man's higher functions.

Some suggest that the explanation is that science studies only phenomena, not "the underlying realities," but they are too late. It is a distinction that belongs to the last century. In those days psychologists especially were as closely watched by the spiritual police as if they were burglars. So they protested that they were concerned only with "states of consciousness," and left the question of the underlying reality to philosophy (which does not want it apparently) and theology (which is incompetent to deal with it).

And what specifically *are* these spiritual realities for which we must die rather than surrender? I should like to put the question to some folk who are so eloquent about them. Those who mean something definite would probably say social idealism, the cultivation of a taste for good art and literature, decent conduct, a zeal for truth and justice. We reply at once that in the latter part of the last century, which they call the age of materialism, there was far more concern to give the mass of the people an appreciation of these things than there has ever been before; enormously more than in the days when everybody believed in spirit. We point out that all the men whom they call the arch-materialists of the last century (Haechel, Buchner, Vogt, etc.), were distinguished for their idealism. We say that any honest inquirer can find that—but let me tread

cautiously here, lest my feet stray into the muddy field of politics. We point out that the leading authorities on such matters assure us that the folk beyond the Iron Curtain, who may or may not be guilty of those terrible things for which Mr. Dulles and Joe McCarthy want us to exterminate them, pay far more attention to these things in their public education than we do, and are enormously more successful in checking crime than America is.

## Satan

By F. A. RIDLEY

AS has often enough been pointed out, the devil is the Freethinkers' best friend: he inspires us with the spirit of doubt and, if the theologians are to be believed, we are doomed—ought we not rather to say, privileged—to spend eternity in his company. Accordingly, what perhaps we may term the natural history of the devil is, or ought to be, a matter of special interest to the sceptic, for there can be no doubt that the devil is an historical character: the imprint of his cloven hoof is stamped indelibly in the pages of history.

As has been indicated before in this column, the Evil One started as a god. The old Persian and Egyptian theologians contemplating this vale of tears which we inhabit here below, held, very logically and reasonably, that a world where such things happen as are of daily occurrence down here, could only be of infernal origin, and that only the devil could have made it, a point of view eminently rationalistic, or so we submit to anyone who contemplates what Gibbon has so trenchantly summarised as, "the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind"; that melancholy record which a German pessimist pithily summarised as "the conjugation of the verb, 'to eat.'" As we have already learned it was the Iranian (Persian) metaphysical theologians, Zoroaster and Manichaeus, to whom we owe the theology of the devil, and a very notable contribution to human knowledge it was.

The devil thus actually started as a god, a divine, an infernally divine being! However, the Jews, that race of stiff monotheists who would not tolerate any equal, or partner, with their tribal god, Jehovah, demoted the devil: for persistent bad conduct, they stripped him of, so to speak, his divine stripes and reduced him to the angelic ranks. Furthermore, the old Hebrew writer whose reflections have come down to us under the anonymous title of *The Book of Job*, and who may be regarded as the creator of the historical, as distinct from the metaphysical, devil, bestowed upon him those essentials of genuine historical existence: "a local habitation and a name." Henceforth, the devil underwent an infernal baptism and "suffered a sea-change" into "Satan." Soon after he seems to have obtained his discharge from the office of a celestial errand boy, as depicted in the opening chapters of *Job*, and to have been "sent down" from Heaven to, precisely, Hell, where he appears to have relished the infernal atmospherics of brimstone so much that he, henceforth, made his permanent headquarters in that congenial spot. *The Book of Job* is, certainly, a very fine poem, with a distinctly sceptical flavour that makes its inclusion in the Holy Scriptures a trifle peculiar. But its primary importance to human knowledge lies in the priceless information it gives us about the devil. By, so to speak, introducing Satan into human affairs in that sorry business of *Job* and the boils with which Satan so inconsiderately afflicted him, we may affirm that the unknown author of *Job* assuredly made a scientific discovery of the very first importance.

The Hebrew author of one great poem, *The Book of Job*, created Satan as an historical character. We are

proud to be able to add that it was another equally great poem, and one written by an Englishman, our immortal compatriot, John Milton, to whom, what we may, we think, accurately describe as the effective modernisation of Satan, of the devil, is primarily due. For, with the publication of Milton's great epic, *Paradise Lost* (1667), Satan, one can say, took on a new lease of life. He became, thereafter, a citizen of the modern world, in fact, almost an Englishman! Amongst the major scientific achievements of the race that gave birth to Newton and to Darwin, we are of opinion that this Miltonic transformation of the Hebrew into the English devil must be held to have been one of the greatest scientific—perhaps "theological"—would be the more apt description—feats ever performed by a member of even that race which Milton himself described as "God's Englishmen."

For let us only consider the remarkable, the epoch-marking, change effected in the character of Satan by John Milton. Here we no longer have the celestial errand boy, who dodges in and out of heaven with terrestrial "copy" for the Almighty. That Hebrew quasi-comic character has now given way to a far more majestic figure, the austere puritan revolutionary, a kind of infernal "Cromwell," who plans an armed revolution against God, much as his earthly prototype, the English regicide, "old Noll" (Cromwell) had done against God's earthly representative, King Charles the First, a few years earlier; a process of rebellion in which Milton himself had taken an active and sympathetic part as an official of the English revolutionary government, and as its official apologist for the execution of Charles the First (1649). Only Satan found God a tougher proposition than Cromwell had found Charles Stuart. The infernal "Ironsides," described in *Paradise Lost*, failed in their charge, and the celestial, unlike the terrestrial "Marston Moor," proved a failure and ended in a precipitate retreat to hell. The modern "Satan," Milton's "Satan," is revolutionary, though unsuccessful, a state of things which we may hope, as Milton himself seems to have hoped, will prove only temporary. He "reigns in hell" because he will not "serve in Heaven."

Successful revolutions represent mainly a matter of military technique. Cromwell, the earthly prototype of the Miltonic Satan, understood this very well when he propounded to his "New Model Army" the historic adjuration, "to trust in God and keep your powder dry." Evidently Satan's legions, who sought to storm paradise, did not "trust in God," and, perhaps, the celestial atmosphere is inimical to dry powder. Evidently something went wrong. However, as Anatole France has more recently demonstrated, given the progress of military science on earth, and the innate conservatism of Heaven, it is only, presumably, a matter of time before another better-equipped attack succeeds. Against modern atomic weapons one cannot estimate highly the angelic equipment of the Lord's hosts; perhaps the Duke of Wellington, who, as a good Christian, is probably in Heaven, might give the Lord some good advice. However, the prospects of "paradise regained" for Satan seem distinctly bright. We can only leave it at that and hope for the best.

That all Freethinkers should be the devil's "non-belligerent" allies in his infernal campaign against God is, we think, clearly indicated by the following glowing testimonial to Satan which concludes the work of one of his most learned biographers. In his erudite *History of the Devil*, Dr. Paul Carus remarks as truthfully, eulogistically: "The devil is the father of all misunderstood geniuses; it is he who induces us to try new paths; he begets originality of thought and deed; he tempts us to venture out boldly into unknown seas for the discovery of new

(concluded on next page)

## INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS

## F. A. Ridley

IN the course of a lifetime's association with advanced movements as speaker and writer, F. A. Ridley was a member of the National Council of the Independent Labour Party (1943-50), and a member of the International Committee for a European United Socialist State. He was a founder, and the leading light, of the Engels Society and edited *Left*. He has also edited the *Socialist Leader* and *The Freethinker*, and is still a regular contributor to the Socialist Press of England and France. His regular articles in the *Socialist Leader* are given prominence. In 1952 he contested a London municipal seat in the Labour interest.

Originally trained for the Church, he is a Licentiate of Theology and university prizeman of Durham University, and has made himself an authority on Jesuit history as well as on the history of political revolution in England. He became a member of the N.S.S. Executive in 1948, and the N.S.S. President in 1952, a position which he still holds. As President he represents the society at the congress of the World Union of Freethinkers.

Blessed with a phenomenal memory for facts on the subjects which interest him, the vast recesses of his knowledge and his fluency in using it make him a most enjoyable companion in conversation; and while it may frequently be possible to disagree with him it is never possible to dislike him. In fact, when he is really in form, which is often, it would need a Boswell to stand in the sidelines and catch for posterity the witticisms and cynicisms with which his remarks are sprinkled.

G. H. T.

*How does outdoor speaking compare with indoor meetings in propaganda value?*

In my opinion outdoor speaking serves a double purpose. It advertises the organisation concerned, and it attracts the intelligent minority to indoor meetings.

*Which, of course, take place in an entirely different atmosphere and call for a different technique?*

Yes, and one man is rarely equally good at both.

*How did you come to devote some of your time to N.S.S. propaganda?*

I began speaking for the N.S.S. at the instigation of my friend the late John Seibert, for the South London branch just before the war. I had the prior advantage of a theological training and of many years' experience on the political platform.

*What do you feel about the straight attack on the Christian Bible?*

This question of "Bible-bashing" can only be dealt with in its terms of reference. In a typical open-air meeting it is not out of date and is never likely to be while England remains a Christian country. Attacks on the Bible, and on its verbal inspiration, would probably be out of date if one were, for instance, engaged in debate with an educated Christian, who would probably fall back on the modernist idea that religion evolves in an evolutionary way and that the Bible contains a "progressive revelation" of unequal spiritual value.

*When you have started lecturing do you ever alter your original plans?*

Not indoors. In the open air and at a speaking pitch with which I am already familiar, I find it is usually more effective to have a look at the particular audience and judge their reactions to my opening remarks before deciding on a subsequent line.

*In your campaign against Roman Catholicism can you hope for support from non-Secularists?*

Organisationally the Protestant churches are loosely

organised in comparison with the Church of Rome, and their theological attitude is much more vague. However, there is undoubtedly a strong core of Protestant anti-Popery in the make-up of the English people, and probably still more in the Welsh and Scottish, a legacy from centuries of bitter political and religious struggles. Let me add that I unequivocally regard the Vatican as the major enemy of freethought to-day, and I am in favour of the N.S.S., if necessary, forming a united front with Protestants in defence of civil and religious liberty.

*Do you attach much importance to the recent campaign of Billy Graham?*

Billy Graham is only a nine days' wonder; the Roman Church may still be here at the end of the century. We can't let Billy Graham divert us from our main objective.

*Amongst other futilities we often hear the religious claim that if there isn't a personal God behind things, then at least "There must be Something"; how do you deal with such an opponent?*

I can't deal with him. I hope that "Something" will!

*And of course you've met the questioner who insists that he's seen a spirit and wants you to disprove it.*

I can't disprove something of whose existence, nature and even appearance I am absolutely ignorant. I might quote the dictum of old Thomas Hobbes: "If a man says that God appeared to him in a dream, what is this but to say that he dreamed that God appeared to him?"

*In conclusion will you give a brief outline of what you consider to be our prospects, not only nationally but on a world scale?*

Nationally I'm afraid the National Secular Society will have to resign itself for a fairly long period—probably for our lifetime—to the arduous, thankless, but absolutely necessary task of a minority pressure-group, an advance guard of radical criticism. Whilst the influence of religious ideas and the number of convinced adherents of religion are certainly on the decline, I'm afraid it will be a long time before religion ceases to be a powerful force in society.

*Can we break the B.B.C. barrier?*

Religion has derived fresh strength from its virtual monopoly of the instruments of mass propaganda such as the radio, and the prospects for secularism will be immensely strengthened when once freethought has access to the media of mass propaganda. One of our primary tasks is to contend for equal rights with the Churches. Internationally, the future of world freethought depends primarily on the final issue of our *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic Church. This largely depends on current political issues on the international level. I would welcome a more definite link-up between organised freethought and the anti-clerical political parties of the Left.

SATAN—(concluded from p.274)

ways to the wealth of distant Indias; he makes us dream of and hope for more prosperity and greater happiness; he is the spirit of discontent that embitters hearts, but in the end often leads to a better arrangement of affairs, and all the heinous features of his character disappear when we consider the fact that he is necessary in the economy of nature as a wholesale stimulant to action and as the power of resistance that evokes the noblest efforts of human beings." (Dr. Paul Carus—*The History of the Devil*, pp. 407-8.)

To add to this noble tribute would clearly be superfluous. These are fine sentiments. We subscribe to them!

## This Believing World

What a blessed word is "Censorship"! It is the one most beloved of all—or nearly all—by Politicians, Militarists, and the Heads of the Churches. Its object is, they will blandly tell you, to "protect" Society. In politics, for example, you should know only your side, the right side—the Opposition ought to be heavily censored. Any General will tell you that in time of war, *everything* should be censored—for your own protection, of course; while in religion, all "heresy" should not only not be permitted but all heretics must, in the interests of Society, be "liquidated," the only logical course to pursue.

The other day, some of our censor-loving magistrates decided that Boccaccio must not be read by anybody, though we were not told exactly what harm would accrue if people did read his *Decameron*. And now a Lord Chancellor wants to suppress the true story of Nazism—that great Totalitarian "ideology" which Hitler and his German followers wanted to force by war on the peoples of the world. This story is perhaps the most ghastly in world history—terrorism, torture, massacre, murder, imprisonment, and a hundred other crimes, carried on to an extent unknown in the world before. Fortunately, the censor this time has not had his way—and we can now all read what is the record of the German Nazis whom he now wants to be our allies.

Although most, if not all, Bishops preach regularly about the mercy and love of God Almighty, the truth sometimes comes from our more humble vicars. Here we have the 75-year-old Rev. W. G. White, the Vicar of Haughley, strongly objecting to the usual twaddle in the official Burial Service where God is thanked for "delivering this, our brother, out of the miseries of this sinful world," when it comes to young officers—only sons—killed in air crashes, or in the cases of people dying young from say, cancer, and other painful diseases. He calls it "blasphemy" to put the blame (or praise) on God—but, in any case, he has forbidden any burial service for him when he dies—a most sensible decision. Birth, marriage, and death, are the occasions when the Church insists on stepping in as if by right. It should be completely excluded.

We are often chided for referring to "reverent" Rationalists, but they will be found digging in everywhere, holding up the Flag of Jesus, not always as a God, it is true, but always as a Man. We note, not with surprise, of course, in our Glasgow contemporary *The Logos*—beg pardon, *The Word*—as befits its more or less pious attitude, a long article, "Testimony for Jesus," by an American writer, quoting even bigger adorers of the Christian Deity. "Against Satan," the writer exultingly cries, "there is no power I know of except the power of revivalism. I look to see this power awakened in the columns of *The Word*." Nobody can now say that the Christ-like efforts of the Rev. B. Graham have failed even though *The Word* had previously bitterly attacked him.

Far greater, however, than the power of revivalism is the astonishing power of the Design Argument. Writing in the *Wallasey Chronicle* the other week, the Rev. N. Stewart tells us that "the sunset and the beauty of nature speak to me of God," though one would like to know what he thinks of the "beauty" of diphtheria germs choking a little child to death, or of cancer killing a young mother, or of an epidemic of cholera decimating a town. They are all designed by God as much as sunsets.

We were delighted to see that the Headmaster of Ledbury Grammar School speaking at its annual Speech Day recently before parents, scotched the lie so prevalent when discussing juvenile delinquency that religion was not taught in schools. "Religious education," he firmly insisted, "was an essential part of our curriculum and was neither ignored nor neglected in the schools." Of course. There may be many causes for children going "wrong," but they all have had religion thoroughly pumped into them.

And what about our convicts—at least, the majority of them—are they not thoroughly religious? With the utmost joy, the B.B.C. is going to broadcast the fervent way in which prisoners in Dartmoor can sing hymns—as if we didn't know it. One of the hymns will be "Breathe on Me Breath of God" which is so very appropriate. In any case, we trust that in future it will be universally recognised how very religious and Christian is our convict population.

## Chapman Cohen on Helping God

IT is a very seductive phrase that we are doing God's work, or that we are helping God. But what is God's work? And why should we do it for him, or even help him to do it? From all that one can judge, God's work is done in such a manner that it takes man no small part of his time to undo it or correct it. God sends diseases and man discovers the antidotes. For generation after generation disease after disease afflicts mankind, punishing both the vicious and the virtuous, the innocent and the guilty alike, and when the remedy comes it comes from man, not from God. And note: The diseases are not created by man but the remedies are. Man does not discover the diseases; they discover him. They are there, in God's scheme of work, ready to hand, eager to operate. The remedies do not thus lie ready to hand. They have to be sought for by laborious, painful, often dangerous, methods. It took 400 years to discover an antidote to syphilis. It took less than 40 years for it to infect Europe from end to end, and it would have operated more quickly had modes of travelling been more rapid.

God's work! The best of the world and of human nature is not God's work, but man's. God did not leave the earth habitable for civilized human beings; it was man who made it so. God spreads a river over a countryside and leaves a morass. Man digs a channel, raises embankments, drains the land and so creates utility, order and the possibilities of development. God leaves man a savage, and human association civilizes him. God leaves man ignorant, and human inquisitiveness and industry give him knowledge. God leaves man the prey of brutal passions; men teach each other how to restrain them, or to transmute them into finer feelings. And all the time God is dogging the footsteps of man, providing a new disease for every change in life, punishing every false step with unflinching cruelty, afflicting old and young, strong and weak, good and bad, with impartial malignancy. Man's only protection against Deity is knowledge, and of all the trees in the Garden of Eden the Tree of Knowledge was the only one of which he was sternly forbidden to eat.

*Essays in Freethinking, Vol. 1.*

We shall one day learn to supersede politics by education.—Emerson.

—NEXT WEEK—

THOMAS PAINE  
By ADRIAN BRUNEL

# THE FREETHINKER

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

## To Correspondents

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CORRECTION.—In the article "On Education" by F. Viney (Aug. 13), "invisible sun" (line 12) should be "invincible sun." Thanks to E. J. Orford and others for pointing this out.

F. BURGESS.—The Secularist outlook in America is represented by *The Truthseeker*; the *Age of Reason*; the *Liberal*; *Common Sense* and *Progressive World*.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

I. CLAYTON'S Lectures.—Friday, August 27, 7-30 p.m. Loveclough (Rossendale); Sunday, August 29, 3-15 p.m. Padiham; 7 p.m., Blackburn Market. Tuesday, August 31, 7-30 p.m., Hapton.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday at 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday at 7-30 p.m.: C. MCCALL.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle St.).—Sunday at 8 p.m.: W. O'NEILL.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields; a Lecture. At Deansgate Blitzed Site, 7-30 p.m.: a Lecture.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, August 29, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, August 29, 7-30 p.m., Old Market Square: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

West London Branch N.S.S.—F. A. RIDLEY, H. ARTHUR, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD and G. H. TAYLOR. Hyde Park, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

### INDOOR

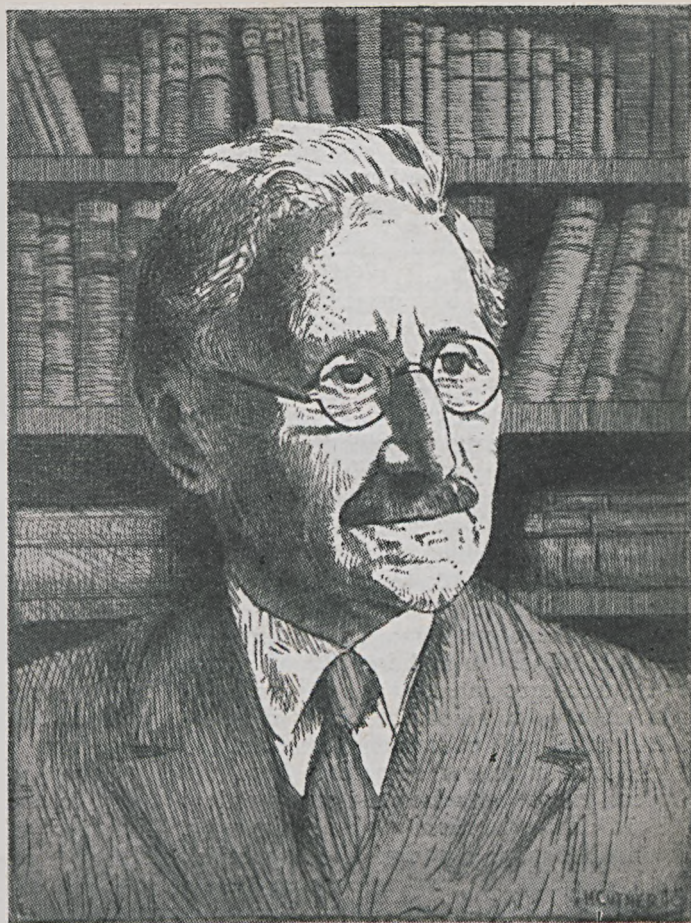
Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street), Sunday, August 29, 7 p.m.; P. VICTOR MORRIS, "The Farce of B.B.C. Religion."

## Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

THE death last February of Mr. Chapman Cohen removes one of the most eminent figures in the freethought-secularist movement, with which he had been associated for the whole of his adult life. In 1915, when G. W. Foote died, he became President of the N.S.S. and Editor of *The Freethinker*, in which he had been a weekly contributor since 1897. Nor did he lay down his pen till compelled by the weaknesses attendant on old age. Given the physical ability to go on, Chapman Cohen would have died in harness; no-one will deny that.

The many tributes which have been received, some of which have been reproduced in these pages, from this and other parts of the world, bear witness to the high esteem in which his life's work is held, both in this country and in the international field of freethought.

We have conferred with Mrs. Chapman Cohen on what form his Memorial should take, and as a result we now



CHAPMAN COHEN Esq. (1939)

H. Burtner - 40

announce the official opening on September 1st, his birthday, of a Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund to aid *The Freethinker*. The normal fund through which we receive donations is suspended, and we ask all his admirers to associate themselves with this last testimony.

Many are they whose mental emancipation from religion and superstition owed much to Chapman Cohen. Their continued support of *The Freethinker* will help to perpetuate the fruits of his mind for the benefit of those to come. Much of Cohen's writing can never be "dated"; it belongs, not to the passing event, but to the basic principles of critical thinking. We should fail in our mission if we allowed a thinker of Cohen's calibre to be lost to future generations. And so long as *The Freethinker* exists his work will never be forgotten.

*The Freethinker* is his monument. "He took the best from others and gave his best to the world."

Donations will be gratefully received by Mr. William Griffiths, Managing Director of the Board of G. W. Foote and Co., Ltd., at the address of *The Freethinker*, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1., marked "Cohen Fund," and acknowledged in these columns.

W.G.

## Notes and News

We are pleased to report that Mr. E. W. Shaw of the N.S.S. Executive, is making a satisfactory recovery after his recent serious illness. For the time being, however, he will be unable to fulfil lecturing engagements which involve travelling. He was to have lectured to the Birmingham branch on August 29, but his place will be taken by Mr. P. Victor Morris, who has brought his lecture on "The Farce of B.B.C. Religion" forward one month.

# Obscenity and Freedom of Thought

By ALEC CRAIG

[This article is part of a lecture by Alec Craig to the Progressive League Conference on "The Anti-Vice Drive—A Threat to Freedom" on March 21 last in London.]

IT is surely wrong that men of letters and serious writers on sexual matters should carry out their work under the shadow of possible, if rather improbable, prosecution. Remember judges and magistrates have spoken in most intemperate language about the work of men like Havelock Ellis and D. H. Lawrence, so that the existence of the law is a danger to the freedom of thought.

Perhaps the most striking example of this was the condemnation under the Obscene Publications Act of Edward Charles's *The Sexual Impulse* in 1935. The sub-title of this book was "An Introduction to the Study of the Psychology and Physiology and Bio-Chemistry of the Sexual Impulse among Adults in Mental and Bodily Health," and it contained forewords by Prof. Julian Huxley and by the late Janet Chance. The book was everything that its title proclaimed and put forward some novel philosophical and scientific ideas. In addition it contained an exposition of coital technique intended for the ordinary educated man and woman, in which the coldly scientific diction which often makes such expositions repugnant and unhelpful was abandoned in favour of a more human and gayer style. Sixteen expert witnesses came forward to testify to the scientific and educational value of the work. Nevertheless, the condemnation was upheld on appeal.

The banning of this book makes it quite clear that the law can be used to stifle the expression of unorthodox views on sexual matters and to prevent the open and intelligent discussion of sexual problems.

This is a lamentable state of affairs. First, because sexual morals do not stay fixed any more than any other human customs, and if they are to develop on healthy lines rational and informed discussion is necessary. This last proposition is, of course, denied by a minority opinion in our democratic land. Both Communists and Roman Catholics (together with the fellow travellers of each camp) believe that ethical questions can best be settled by authoritative dogma enforced by fear and perpetuated in ignorance. There are also certain Protestant bodies whose puritanical leanings, though not very logically defined, tend to make them deny in the field of sex those principles of freedom of inquiry and liberty of conscience which they uphold elsewhere. Unhappily the law is a very ready weapon in the hands of all such people.

It is also inimical to the promotion of true morality. The consensus of opinion among people in a position to know—lawyers, doctors, social workers and the like—that sexual education is a very potent factor in promoting good morals is very large. Even if people embark on courses of conduct that are open to question from the ethical point of view, it is better that they should do so in possession of sound information about contraception, the prophylaxis of venereal disease and the like, than without such information. More generally we may say that a healthy opinion on what is right and wrong can only be based on knowledge, and that ignorance is an unsure if not misleading foundation for conduct.

Books of sex instruction are, however, constantly harassed by the law, particularly by prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act. Condemnations are often made in respect of books by reputable authors, and which have been openly published for years. This is best illustrated by mentioning some of the books condemned by the Blackpool magistrates in 1950, in a number of related cases

resulting from a purity drive in which the police had raided several shops.

Among the books condemned were the following:—

*Encyclopedia of Sexual Knowledge*, edited by (the late) Dr. Norman Haire. This book had been widely and openly published since 1934 and is still obtainable in ordinary bookshops.

*Sexual Anomalies and Perversions*, by Magnus Hirschfeld, based on the work of the great German sexologist, who contributed very largely to bringing the problems of sexual inversion into the open. The old principle of hush-hush caused a vast deal of misery and suffering; particularly in cases where a young man or woman, the victim of some perhaps comparatively mild and common anomaly, supposed that he or she of all the world was tainted by some diabolical curse. This book was again prosecuted at Newcastle the following year. This time Dr. Haire went up personally as an expert witness and testified to the scientific and educational value of the work, and the magistrates refused to order its destruction.

*Five books of sex instruction*, by Rennie MacAndrew (1938-46), which had been published all over the country and are still obtainable from reputable booksellers.

*The Technique of Sex*, by Anthony Havil, the non-deplume of a very distinguished gynaecologist, openly published since 1939.

*A Plain Talk on Sex Difficulties*, by Dr. F. B. Rockstro, an effective little work. [The late Dr. Rockstro was a friend of Mr. Craig's, and the British Sexological Society, of which Mr. Craig is librarian, sold the book for many years.—ED.]

(To be concluded)

## Burning Thomas Paine

AMONG the objects to which the Cardiff Corporation subscribed in the eighteenth century, was the burning of an effigy of Thomas Paine, the great reformer, and the first man in Britain to advocate Old Age Pensions. So great was the hatred developed against this great man by parsons, priests, and preachers, after the publication of his book, *The Rights of Man*, that had they caught him, his execution would have been certain. Fortunately he escaped.

However, the Churches and the brewers arranged for a general holiday, and the local council decided that the burning of Thomas Paine should take place in Saint John's Square just outside Cardiff Castle.

Thousands of poor deluded wretches from the Rhondda, Aberdare and the Monmouthshire valleys, marched into Cardiff, headed by the fanatical leaders of the purveyors of superstition, and the pubs were packed all day by drunken sots who were supplied with free beer.

The burning of Thomas Paine had been announced from all pulpits for weeks previously. Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, had promised to attend, but owing to an epidemic of smallpox and typhoid fever which was raging at the time, he thought better of it, and did not turn up.

The account of this piece of barbarism can be seen in an old Minute Book preserved in the City Hall at Cardiff.

The effigy of Thomas Paine and his clothes cost £2, and the hanging and burning the infidel Thomas Paine.

No apology has ever been made for this piece of savagery by any subsequent Council of the City.

PAUL VARNEY.

# Stage and Life

by P. VICTOR MORRIS

WHEN the theatre becomes a vehicle for the discussion of ideas with which the National Secular Society concerns itself, plays and players can rightly be given a place in the columns of *The Freethinker*. The play *Murder Story*, by Ludovic Kennedy, now being presented at the Cambridge Theatre, London, has a claim on our interest because it is critical of the way in which the death penalty (which most N.S.S. members wish to see abolished) works in practice, and because it introduces religious episodes in considering this question.

Jim Tanner is the eighteen-year-old, mentally-retarded son of a respectable London bus conductor and his wife. He loses his job in a factory when his illiteracy is discovered owing to faults in his work after he has been given some typed instructions which he cannot read. Under the influence of Ted Clift, a really vicious product of bad wartime conditions of family life, he takes part in a burglary. When the pair of them are surprised on the job by the police, Ted shoots one of them, and Jim, who has been persuaded against his will to carry a cosh, escapes, only to be arrested at his home later the same night. His father has a heart attack which keeps him away from work and confined to a couch for the rest of the play.

The action skips the next two months, and, surprisingly, we then find Jim in a condemned cell awaiting the death sentence that has been passed on him and Ted. Such is his docility and simplicity that everyone outside of the Court of Criminal Appeal and the Home Office sees him as an innocent victim of events, and is quite sure that he ought not to hang. The decision does not rest with them, however, and his appeal and a petition for his reprieve are alike unsuccessful. The final curtain falls on a scene of anguish in his home as the clock strikes the hour of his execution.

It is clear that the play, which is competently and sincerely performed, deals only with a hard case, and not with the general question of the death penalty. It may be that the author's point of view is no more developed than that of the prison officer who refers to Ted Clift, Jim's tempter and the one who fired the fatal shot, as "that other bastard." We are not convinced that in real life a lad as soft as Jim, whose plight touches the heart of everybody we see in the play, could fail to make a similar impression on the judge and jury who tried the case. Apart from a short display of tantrums, he is palpably innocent and irresponsible. Such a story may move us during its portrayal, but it will not effect a revolution in either the public's or the official attitude towards the legal punishment for murder.

We are, however, shown the waste of human time involved in the provision of two prison officers to be with the condemned man day and night without break throughout the period from his sentence to his execution. This is relieved by the humanity of one of them who undertakes to teach Jim to read and write. The latter shows himself such a willing and apt pupil, incidentally, that it hardly tallies with his earlier failure to acquire this knowledge.

The religious incidents in the play raised no laughs, but they deserved to; for, by making Jim swallow every suggestion offered to him by the prison chaplain, the author evades all problems. We learn that the parson, a decent, modest and undogmatic sort of chap (how rarely one meets this kind!) has read to Jim the story of Adam and Eve out of the Bible. "I liked that," was Jim's comment. "Well, we don't know for certain," the chaplain tells him, "but

it seems to me that, if God puts us into the world as he did Adam and Eve, he will be there waiting for us when we have to leave it. We all have to some time." Jim, of course, raises no objection. "What is God like?" he asks. "Some people think of him as old and kind—like Father Christmas," replies the parson. "I like that," comes back Jim, helpfully.

He really is too easy game, so there is no element of surprise in the ending of the scene, with the pair of them down on their knees in the cell, and the parson reciting his favourite prayer, commencing "God be in my head and in my understanding" and closing with "God be in my end and in my departing." It is all very moving, undenominational and no doubt satisfactory to an average British audience not much bothered by theological niceties; and much less disturbing than would have been the sort of tussle that "that other bastard," also in a condemned cell in the same prison, might have put up. After all, Ted Clift and his kind are a far greater problem in our modern society than are the Jim Tanners. They have grown up in an environment of war, suspicion, bureaucratic controls, advantage-grabbing and success-worship, all covered with a veneer of hypocritical religion. The mixture has made them what they are, and something different is needed to change them. However, this play has no ideas to offer on how to deal with this matter.

Its inadequacy in this respect is particularly obvious in the last scene, when we are taken back to the home of the Tanners on the morning of the execution. We had previously seen them before the petition for their son's reprieve had been presented, cheered by kindly messages from hundreds of well-wishers and full of hope for the outcome of the petition. Now we see them crushed in spirit. Curiously, Jim's elder sister goes off to work as usual—surely this could never happen!—leaving the parents alone. Then the prison chaplain arrives. He is not attending the execution, and Jim has asked him to be with his people at the end. He brings a letter that their son has written to them, bidding them "keep your chin up." The clock strikes nine, the hour of the execution, and the chaplain repeats the same prayer that the audience has already heard him recite in the prison cell. As he came to the finish, "God be in my end and in my departing," I wondered how many of the audience had been struck by the complete absence of any evidence of a divine influence at work at any time during the play.

Some critics deplore all attempts to utilise the stage as a means of focusing public attention on social problems. Yet the individual problems that they regard as permissible subjects of stage treatment are often typical of cases that are very common, so it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line. With all its faults, Mr. Kennedy's play may prove the starting point for many who see it of serious thought on the questions it touches, and it may encourage more plays that will deal with important topics in a less orthodox manner. If so, he will deserve our thanks.

## A Play Worth Seeing

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

**The Wooden Dish** now showing at The Phoenix Theatre, London, is a play which our London readers should not miss. It deals with a problem which affects thousands of homes to-day—that of a young married couple having to share the home with an elderly parent (in this case, the father of the husband).

The old man, played magnificently by Wilfrid Lawson, occupies the centre of the picture. His twin desires are tobacco and beer, and he is now becoming senile and getting on his daughter-in-law's nerves, so much that she

feels she cannot any longer bear the cramped existence she is forced to live and longs to be free and able to enjoy while she is still young enough, the life that she feels is being wasted.

Although the scene is laid in one of the Out West States of U.S.A. the play applies to practically every country, and we read in our papers and hear of similar situations almost daily.

Joan Miller, as the frustrated wife, is also magnificent, and they have an excellent supporting caste.

This play which was well received in Newcastle-on-Tyne and in Nottingham, holds the attention from start to finish, and, nowadays, when so many theatres cater for escapism and shallowness, it comes as a delightful change.

## Labour Obstacle

ONE of the obstacles Labour has to overcome in Australia is the sensitiveness of the Labour machine to the Roman Catholic Church. Four-fifths of Labour M.P.s tend to be drawn from the Catholic Church in a time and day when the Catholic Communion represents not more than one-fifth of the population. If this occurred once people would say it is merely an accident, but when it occurs decade after decade people start to believe that it is due more to planning than accident.

How often do we hear reference to the Catholic dominated Labour Party? Evatt is not a Catholic and has not hesitated to take any attitude he has believed to be correct notwithstanding any displeasure he might give the Catholic hierarchy, but the attitude of many Labour M.P.s in Victoria towards Evatt during the last referendum would suggest that some M.P.s in caucus obey Catholic instructions.

What an uproar there would be if the Labour M.P.s were nine-tenths non-Catholic, and yet to call attention to Catholic dominance of Labour is to incur an immediate charge of bigotry. I make bold to say that four-fifths of the Australian Labour M.P.s could only be Catholic if bigotry were at work, if the Catholic political machine has set itself to dominate the Labour machine. The non-Catholic voters are estranged in tens of thousands by this obvious ramp.

We see the result at times in legislation. In some Australian States the bachelor priests have caused the Catholic M.P.s to legislate to make it an offence to advertise a book which advises parents on family planning. At the week-end I have been reading a number of Protestant papers and all express concern at the possibility of the return of a Catholic dominated Labour Party. The Catholic Church is feared because it is supposed to be able to poll the casting vote in many marginal constituencies.

(From JOHN A. LEE'S, N.Z.)

## Tangles

Great minds such tangles make  
In loving one another.  
We lesser mortals quake  
Each time they mention "Brother"  
Or "Comrade," or "Just Cause."  
At all these words we pause—  
And shudder.

R. W. HOBBS.

THOMAS PAINE, A Pioneer of Two Worlds. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s.; postage 1½d.

## Correspondence

### INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

I was very interested in F. A. Ridley's article on the Greek philosophers. But I think it is well to remember that the Greek systems of thought were by no means original. They had been proclaimed centuries before in India by the Sankhya and Vaisheshika schools of philosophy at a period when Greece was still in its Orphic slumbers.—Yours, etc.,

L. FAWCETT.

### VIRGIN BIRTHS

I am aware of the various reports about virgin births, and I am also aware of the modernist attempt to explain away the word "virgin" by maintaining that it is a misinterpretation. I feel that in endeavouring to maintain this the modernist is indeed "straining at a gnat."

According to the Bible, before Christ is born, before he is conceived in fact, an angel appears to Mary to foretell this birth. She is very surprised, asking: "How can these things be, seeing that I know not a man?" It is then carefully explained that the birth will be a miraculous one. Likewise when Joseph becomes aware of Mary's conception he wishes to "put her away," but again the position is carefully explained to him. In view of these and one or two other relevant passages, I cannot understand how anyone can accept the word "virgin" in any but the modern and true Biblical sense. To maintain otherwise is to remove the word from its context. The only rational alternative seems to be that of the myth theory, in which the whole story is relegated to the limbo of mythology and folk-lore.—Yours, etc.,

G. DICKINSON.

### SPIRIT PAINTINGS

I was most interested to read the account of "spirit" pictures in this week's *Freethinker*. So they are still using the same old tricks. In 1888, a famous American medium, Madame O'Dely Diss-Debar, produced some oil paintings, presumably painted by departed old masters.

These pictures were the subject of a court case, and produced roars of laughter when they were produced in court.

These low grade daubs were discovered to have been painted by a man named Friedlander, who testified to that effect in court. This story and many others, can be read in Joseph F. Rinn's new book: *Searchlight on Psychical Research*.

C. H. HUMMERSLEY.

### FILM PROPAGANDA

A recent article in *The Freethinker* commented in the way religion is creeping into films on every possible occasion.

I have just seen one entitled "Father Brown," which must be one of the worst of its kind with this end in view. Not only is constant reference made to texts from the Bible, but chapter and verse are given. To crown the stupidity the character of Father Brown relates the following piece of tomfoolery: "There was a woman who did only one kind action in her life; she gave an onion to a beggar. She died and went to hell, but an angel took pity on her, and let down on a string an onion! She clucked at this but the other souls also clamoured for it, and she cried out, 'It is mine.' Immediately she said 'mine' the string broke and she fell back into hell." This is dished up to adult audiences. Of such is the Kingdom of the Cinema!

J. DRISCOLL.

### OBITUARY

#### Mr. H. L. SEARLE

Bradford Branch has suffered a serious loss in the person of Harry Leslie Searle at the age of 80. Mr. Searle had been continuously in membership since the Branch was re-formed in 1929 and was always in office as President, Secretary or Treasurer of the Branch, having held the latter office over the last eight or nine years.

He was a much-travelled man, and delivered altogether over sixty lectures to the Branch audiences, mostly on scientific subjects. Scholarship and the quality of dependability were his outstanding characteristics, and we are going to miss him very much. He was our sage, our philosopher, our scientist, our scholar; and his rock-like personality was one of the main factors in the survival of our Branch during some of its worst times.

To his wife, sister and nieces we extend our condolences. The funeral service, previous to his cremation on Thursday, August 12 at Bradford Crematorium, was a secular one conducted by the Branch Secretary.

W.B.